

ISSUE 219 NOVEMBER 2018
WWW.GAMESRADAR.COM/OXM
XBOX
FFICIAL MAGAZINE
ASSASSIN'S CREED ODYSSEY
MASSIVE PREVIEW OF THE EPIC GREEK RPG
WE'VE PLAYED IT!
RESIDENT EVIL 2
First look at the stunning Xbox One remake of the survival horror classic
47 NEW GAMES
DARKSIDERS III OVERCOOKED 2 MUTANT YEAR ZERO INDIVISIBLE NO MAN'S SKY TWIN MIRROR EARTHFALL VERMINTIDE 2 NIDHOG 2 TRIALS RISING SEKIRO AND MORE...
FUTURE
MAKE AN INDIE GAME
How you can become a game developer





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It's all Greek to us…



Chris Burke
Editor
OXM's *Fortnite* expert has spent an unnatural amount of time playing the game this month (see the results in our *Fortnite* Pocket Handbook). His outraged mum called the videogame police.

Since Altair's adventure hit the Xbox 360 in 2007, we've had almost an *Assassin's Creed* game a year. In context, these days bands put out an album every four years, if you're lucky. We've waited the same amount of time for *Crackdown 3*. And the *AC* games are always massive, each one transporting us in Xbox-shaped time-machines to historical worlds full of engaging stories and hours and hours of gameplay. This year's Greek epic *Odyssey* looks like being the biggest and most engaging *AC* yet, and we'll have to invent a time-machine just to have enough time to play it. Read our huge in-depth hands-on preview and dev Q&A from page 40 this month, plus we look back at the entire history of the series! Elsewhere, we have gameplay previews of *Resident Evil 2*, *Sekiro*, and new *FIFA* and *PES* games, a chat with *Darksiders III* devs Gunfire Games, and more. Enjoy!

THE OXM TEAM



Daniella Lucas
Deputy editor
Dani has been raving about an adorable new pet that she found on a planet in *No Man's Sky*. Her hamster, Squonk, is so jealous he's refusing to go in his hamster ball.



Adam Bryant
Staff writer
Adam's commuting woes get ever worse. One day this month, his train to work was so late, he was in fact early for the following day. Which surprised us all.



Warren Brown
Senior art editor
We wired up **OXM**'s crazily busy art guy and took a picture of his brain activity. It was all vector graphics and pixelly spaceships, like '80s arcade game *Tempest*.



Russell Lewin
Production editor
When we told Russ that the new *Assassin's Creed* game was inspired by Homer, he seemed pleased, and told us that he's always been a *Simpsons* fan. D'oh!

ISSUE 219 NOVEMBER 2018

EDITORIAL
Editor Chris Burke **burkey13a**
chris.burke@futurenet.com
Senior Art Editor Warren Brown **wozbrown**
Deputy Editor Daniella Lucas **CelShadedDreams**
Production Editor Russell Lewin **FloatedRelic264**
Staff Writer Adam Bryant **Firebreedpunk**
Our Man Down Under Paul Taylor **Paulus McT**

CONTRIBUTORS
Writing Stephen Ashby, Kimberley Ballard, Louise Blain, Vikki Blake, Steve Hogarty, Phil Iwaniuk, Martin Kitts, Samantha Loveridge, Dave Meikleham, Alex Nelson, Dom Peppiatt, Alex Spencer, Justin Towell, Ben Wilson
Art Georgine Hodsdon, Rebecca Shaw

BUSINESS
Vice President, Sales
Stacy Gaines, stacy.gaines@futurenet.com
Vice President, Strategic Partnerships
Isaac Ugay, isaac.ugay@futurenet.com
East Coast Account Director
Brandie Rushing, brandie.rushing@futurenet.com
East Coast Account Director
Michael Plump, michael.plump@futurenet.com
Midwest Account Director
Jessica Reinert, jessica.reinert@futurenet.com
West Coast Account Director
Austin Park, austin.park@futurenet.com
West Coast Account Director
Brandon Wong, brandon.wong@futurenet.com
West Coast Account Manager
Tad Perez, tad.perez@futurenet.com
Director of Marketing Robbie Montinola
Director, Client Services Tracy Lam
Director, Retail Sales Bill Shewey

CIRCULATION
Head of Newstrade Tim Mathers

Head of Production Mark Constance
Production Project Manager Clare Scott
Advertising Production Manager Joanne Crosby
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Phone (650) 872-1642
Fax (650) 872-2207
Website www.futureus.com
ISSN 1534-7850

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OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE (ISSN 1534-7850) is published 13 times a year (monthly plus Holiday issue following December issue), by Future US, Inc., One Lombard Street, Suite 200, San Francisco, CA 94111. Phone: (650) 872-1642. Fax (650) 872-2207. Website: www.futureus.com. Periodicals postage paid in San Bruno, CA and at additional mailing offices. Newsstand distribution is handled by Time Warner Retail.Canadian orders must be prepaid. Canadian price includes postage and GST #R128220688. PMA #40612608. Subscriptions do not include newsstand specials. **POSTMASTER:** Send changes of address to Official Xbox Magazine, PO Box 2024, Langhorne, PA 19047, USA. Standard Mail enclosed in the following edition: None. Ride-Along enclosed in the following editions: None. Canadian returns: IMEX Global Solutions, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, Canada. Future US, Inc. also publishes @Gamer, Crochet Today!, Mac|Life, Maximum PC, and PC Gamer.



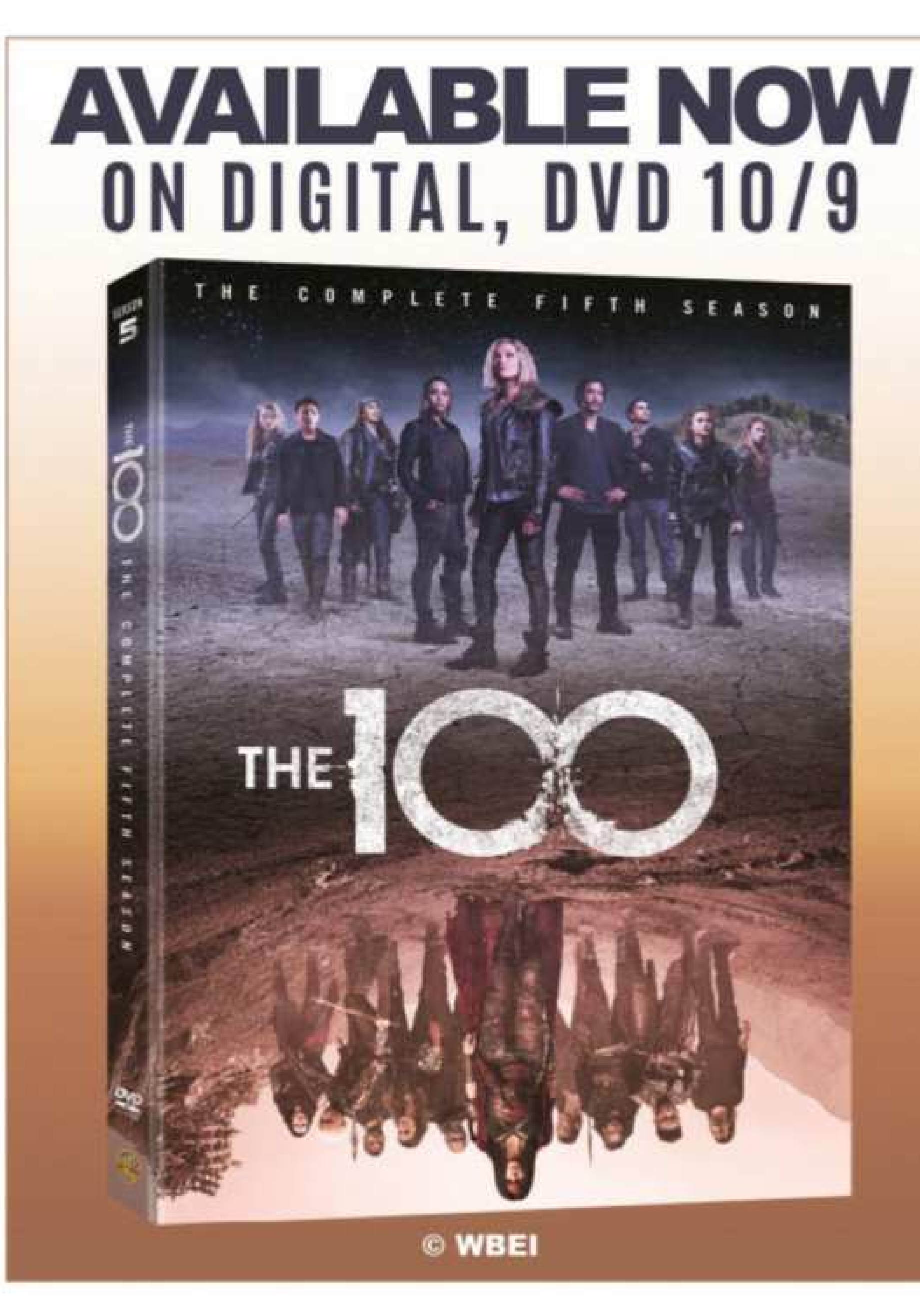
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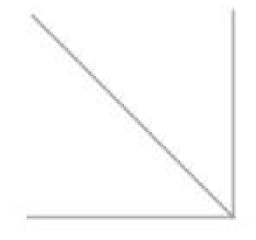

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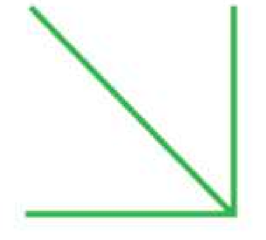






HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY? WHY NOT WRITE TO TEAM OXM AT OXM@FUTURENET.COM

insider



To deal with the recent worldwide heatwaves, we're taking another dip in the ocean of Sea Of Thieves (p10) thanks to a massive update. Our new skeleton pirate friends seem to have found the hot weather even harder than us judging by the fact all of their skin has melted off. Maybe we'll end up like that soon—we can't go swimming anymore thanks to the risk of Megalodon attacks. Elsewhere, the news hasn't been as kind, as Onrush (p14) developer Evolution Studios has undergone a huge round of layoffs after disappointing sales, despite *Onrush* having reviewed really well. Thankfully, we can binge some Netflix to help us deal with the bad news. The TV streaming giant has announced that season two of the Castlevania anime will be coming in October. Read all of the details on p16. Finally, there's some news concerning the Metal Gear Solid movie over on p20, including a Fulton balloon's worth of beautiful concept art. Fingers crossed this will be the film to prove that videogames can make for good movies; after all, Kojima has given director Jordan Vogt-Roberts some advice on how to make it.





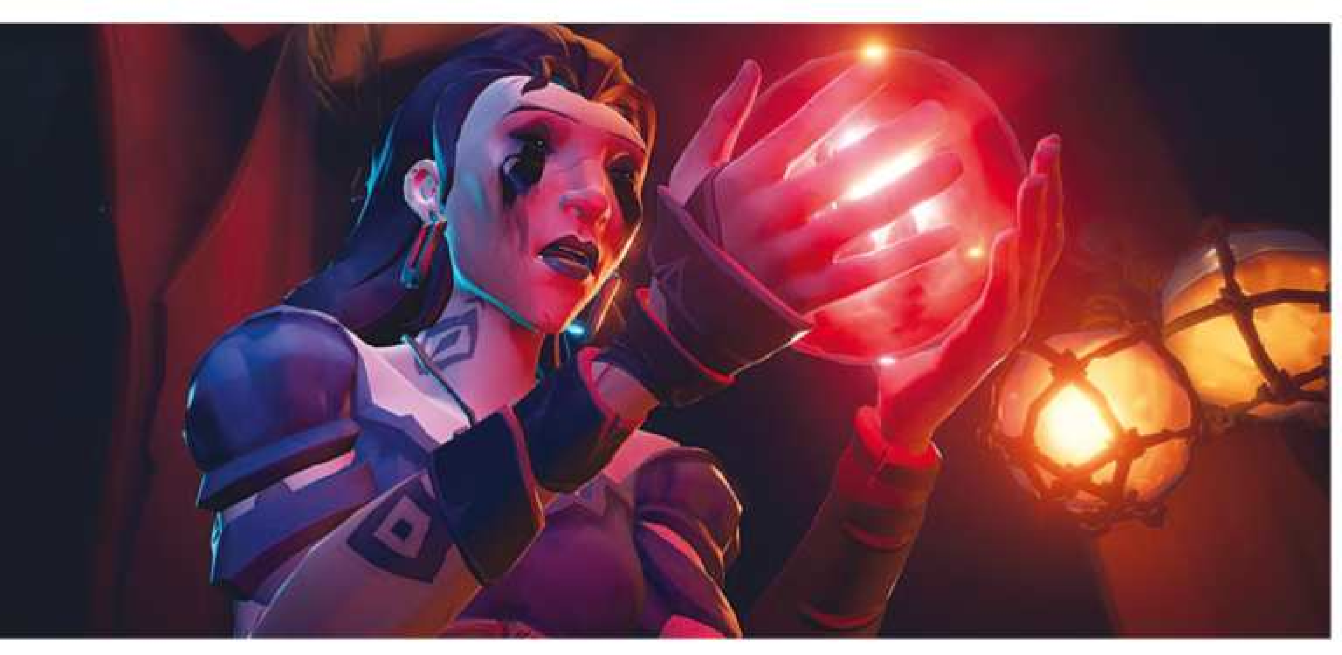














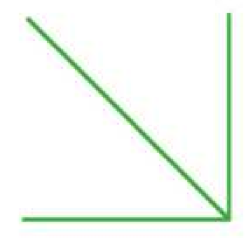




Feeling more shore of itself

Rare's Sea Of Thieves was treading water at first, but now it's smoother sailing for the co-operative nautical experience





While it may not be enjoying the tabloid controversies of *Fortnite* or the message board meltdowns of *PUBG*, *Sea Of Thieves* is still weathering storms and bringing home the booty—and it's just sailed past its most impressive milestone to date.

Sea Of Thieves launched earlier this year to a tepid reception (though we loved it)—some critics thought it was an interesting social experiment, but that it lacked a defined goal. Some players thought it was a pretty lil' project to gawp at, but that it was something that failed to really get them hooked. A lot of people—judging by the turbulent first few months of the game—thought it was just too competitive, and started to drift away from the game.

But Rare didn't get listless, and let its passion project of the last generation get away from it—no, instead the developer battened down the hatches and stared right in the face of the criticism. Players felt the game lacked a common goal, that every crew on the open ocean was pitted against each other, fighting for copy/paste rewards in fetch quests that never really broke the mould or got their hearts racing.

Rare went back to the drawing board, cutting up the plans it had for its original roadmap, and starting work on something fresh. The result of that was The Hungering Deep—an expansion that brought even the most antagonistic crews together and forced them to join hand-in-hand with other voyagers in a quest to take down a legendary sea creature.

This limited-time event made everyone realize that there was fun in co-operation, that players could have a better time working in tandem, that the vessels and weapons made better sense turned on thrashing monstrosities than each other.

Peace of the action

The result of this Rare experiment? Player numbers soared. For a week—by the developers' own admission—they called the game 'Sea Of Friends', and internal telemetry on the Rare computers noted ship encounters ending in combat had halved. It's what Rare had wanted at launch—this more even mix of partying and pillaging—and it set the tone for the developers' next content drop.

Released in late July, Cursed Sails added something else to the watery sandbox of Microsoft's experimental exclusive: Skeleton ships. It took the pressure off the pacifist players that came up against *Sea Of Thieves*' more aggressive player-base: Now they had AI ships to pillage and board, without having to grief the chilled vessels that just want to drop off some gold and have a beer.

Word about the game's more relaxed social experience spread, and lapsed players started to migrate back



Small bites

As well as bigger updates like Cursed Sails, there are still plenty of regular, smaller events to keep you busy. These are usually only around for a limited time, such as finding skeleton thrones and underwater statues, but they give players a good reason to keep checking back in. Plus the potential for extra loot is always a nice bonus.

ABOVE The ships you find encourage more co-operative play rather than trolling others.

to the title. After the launch of Cursed Sails, Microsoft announced that *Sea Of Thieves* had attracted a whopping *5,000,000* players in its lifetime, helping content creators log more than 300,000,000 hours of content watched on YouTube, and rack up over 40,000,000 hours of content streamed on Twitch. No mean feat for a game that was essentially offered for free via Xbox Games Pass.

Come together

The Cursed Sails update shunted Rare further down the co-operative path, thanks to the Alliance feature that went live with the patch. Alliance is effectively a tool that allows players to meet in the world, form an alliance and adventure together, but always with the chance that the temptation of treachery could get too much. It's the Rare philosophy condensed: 'You should be nice, but we appreciate you might wanna rebel.' It's all part of the charm of *Sea Of Thieves*.

"Rare is rolling with the waves and taking this game where it needs to go"

Cursed Sails also added in some new weapons that could let players mess with their fellow pirates, but in a more... psychological way. Cursed Cannonballs were added to the armory with the update, allowing players to get the enemy crew drunk (Grog Balls), lock their rudder in place to prevent them from steering (Rudder Balls), or weigh the opposing vessel down enough it will start taking on water (Ballast Balls).

It's evidence that Rare understands both sides of what players want from the game: They want enough content, and AI encounters to be able to test their burgeoning arsenal, but they also want peace of mind and security that not every one of their missions will be interrupted by girefers with nothing better to do but prey on weaker ships. In giving players more tools to defend themselves, Rare is also giving them more motivation to play—by themselves or with other people. The developer has found a great balance.

But where does it go from here? Rare has already dropped two pretty hefty expansions that inject more opportunities, more life, more *personality* into the pirate simulator, and its original roadmap is in tatters. Something players have lamented since launch is the lack of a distinctive-feeling endgame—a proper challenge that grizzled seadogs can really get their teeth into.

That's about to change. Dropping in September is *another* new expansion called Forsaken Shores, that's designed to test even the most





Chris Burke

It's great to see the game getting the wind back in its sails after it felt like it was in the doldrums. The potential was there, but when its seas felt a bit lifeless or player encounters unforgiving, it's been hard to stay on board. Bring me that horizon, Rare!



Warren Brown

This new content has got ol' White Shark Woz's attention and he may well come out of pirate retirement. Sounds like I'll have to learn to work more co-operatively, so no more one-man sloop attacks on galleons. Fetch me my peg leg, I've got skelies to kill!



Daniella Lucas

Cursed Sails has given me a reason to jump back into the life of a pirate. While I love *Sea Of Thieves*, like many I drifted away, finding the time to play, with so many other service-based games out there, hard. I'll keep dipping in for expansions.

SANDS OF THE HOURGLASS…

So just how many gamers are really out and about on the ocean waves?

Sea Of Thieves may be enjoying inflated player numbers, but it's important to consider how Microsoft and Rare are measuring them in the wake of services like Microsoft Game Pass gaining popularity. It appears that numbers are generated via who's logged in, or unique player counts, but figures suggest that average play time of the game clocks in at around 20 hours.

Is that a figure that's as impressive to Rare as claiming 5,000,000 people have tried out your title? It's up for debate. But as gaming switches to more subscription-based services, it's important to be more critical of figures that we are fed by publishers… because traditional sales numbers may soon be a thing of the past.



experienced *Sea Of Thieves* player and push crews to their absolute limit. The centerpiece of this imposing new territory is the Devil's Roar: a massive volcano that's unstable and volatile, quaking with volcanic activity and new (as yet undisclosed) threats.

Staying afloat

Rare notes that resources are going to be far harder to come by in this area, and that the rowing boat it's planning to add in with the expansion is going to be needed if you want to survive… Maybe you'll need it to get from one volcanic island to another, maybe you'll have to load it with gunpowder barrels and leave it as a trap for other vessels trying to navigate the volcanic waterways. It's up to you.

At launch, players were put off by *Sea Of Thieves*' apparently scant offering of pirate-based activity: a few ships, a few quests, and a relentless tide of hostility made the game unwelcoming—and feeling very un-Rare. Since launch, and via carefully deployed, well-researched updates, the team at the UK-based studio have managed to keep their heads above water, and start to turn the game around, resulting in something more accessible, with much more to offer.

RIGHT The next update is set to add a new, fiery area to explore. But lava isn't great for wooden ships.

BELOW Forget the older monsters, still prowling the deep, amongst all of this new stuff at your peril.





It's clear that, even though the original roadmap was thrown to the wind at launch, Rare is rolling with the waves and taking this game where it needs to go. Three expansions later, *Sea Of Thieves* continues to gather momentum and attract sailors, in spite of the odds. Whether new people are buying into the game outright, or joining via Xbox Game Pass, it's clear there's life in the game yet, and you can bet your last dubloon you're going to see more content drop into it before the year's out. ■

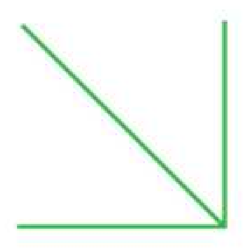
HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT SEA OF THIEVES? TELL US AT WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/OXMUK



END OF THE ROAD

Being Rushed out

The developers of Onrush and Driveclub have been hit by wide-reaching layoffs



It's never nice to be the bearer of bad news, but despite reviewing well, the excellent vehicle combat game *Onrush* didn't quite meet expectations at retail, and now the developer is seeing wide-scale layoffs. The studio, Evolution, hasn't had an easy time over the last few years, originally being dropped by Sony and disbanding in 2016 before being picked up again by Codemasters.

Racing games tend to be quite a tough sell, as it's hard to market a title as being unique compared to others in the same genre. But although *Onrush* was never expected to be a huge game, it's still massively disappointing to hear that it didn't do as well as it evidently deserved. The game picked up a very respectable 8/10 in **OXM**.

In response to the sales results, Codemasters has laid off senior Evolution staff including, most surprisingly, *Driveclub* and *Onrush* director Paul 'Rushy' Rustchynsky, who was very much considered the face of both games, and an advocate of the genre as a whole.

It's quite surprising to see so many cuts from the top. Within the games industry, it's more typical in such situations to see companies scaling back on more junior positions, replacing them as and when another development project comes along. The move suggests that Codemasters may intend to turn the studio into a more supportive role to assist with other games within the company, or on less risky projects.

Stay on track

When questioned about the cuts, a spokesperson for Codemasters said: "It is normal in the course of business for game teams to evolve as projects launch and move into service, and as other new projects start. As such, it isn't appropriate to comment on day to day movement of staff changes."

> **"It sadly doesn't paint a bright picture for the future of racing games"**

More happily for *Onrush* players, future updates won't be affected by the staff changes, as they will still roll out as originally planned, so those that own a copy of the game have no need to worry.

Nevertheless, it sadly doesn't paint a bright picture for the future of racing games, especially those that try to do something a little different aside from standard tournaments and straightforward racing competition. Codesmasters' other racing game, *F1 2018*, still looks set to be a stable entry this year, and well-established series such as *Forza* or *Need For Speed* are still safe bets.

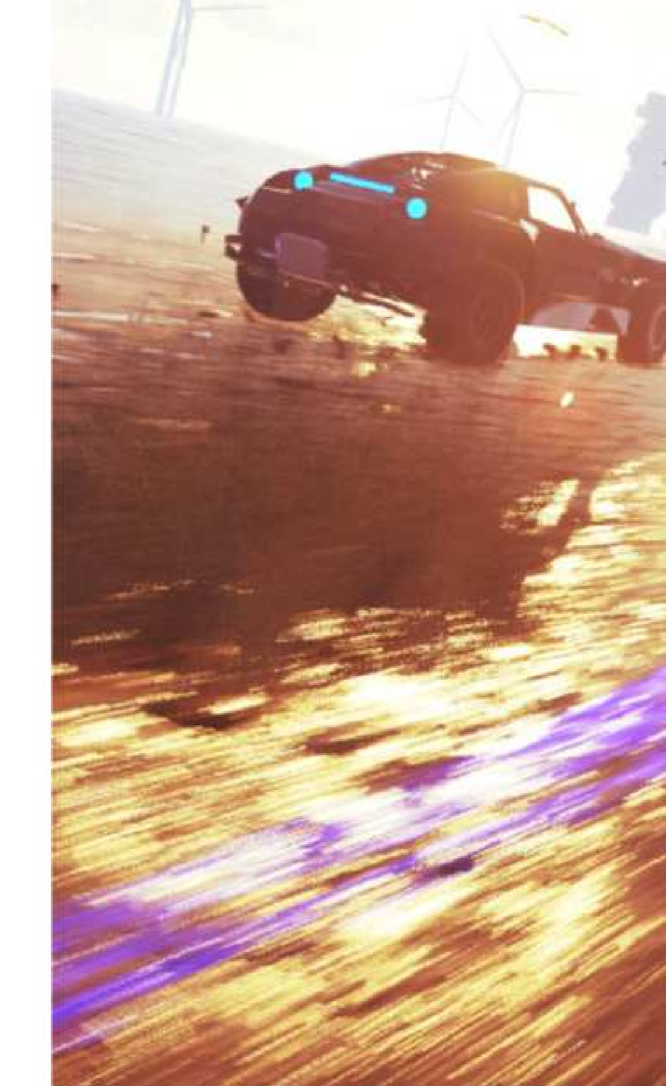
Fun kart games also seem to be a stable proposition, as they appeal to all ages, while a lighter take on vehicular combat is an established characteristic of the genre.

However, anyone thinking about attempting to enter the genre with a new take on racing games may well be more hesitant following the news of Evolution's troubles.

Upon reviewing *Onrush*, **OXM** noted: "It's very rare to see a decently large budget and one of the best teams in the business given the chance to try something completely new, but that's what's happened with *Onrush*. It's a racing game with *SSX*'s jumps and boost, *Burnout*'s takedown system, and *CoD*-style loadouts." If a racer this innovative can't make it out there, who else can?

Studio history

While many of Evolution's previous games weren't available on Xbox, the studio had a reputation for producing excellent racing experiences. They made the likes of *Motorstorm*, *Driveclub*, and *World Rally Championship*, preferring a more arcade style over realism.



ABOVE Part of the problem was a lack of clear messaging as to *Onrush*'s unique selling point.

RIGHT Many people believed *Onrush* to be another racer, unaware of the combat elements.

Check out our F1 2018 review in the next issue of OXM.





PLAY/EJECT

THE THINGS PUSHING OUR BUTTON (OR NOT)



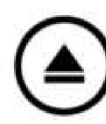
Masked Menace
Voldo has joined the roster for *Soulcalibur VI* in a rather, uh, pointy BDSM suit. The creepiest character in fighting games is definitely living up to his reputation.



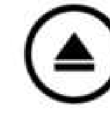
New roster
Negan from *The Walking Dead* will be joining the *Tekken 7* line-up. An unexpected choice, but a welcome one.



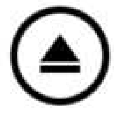
Crossing over
The famous Behemoth from the *Final Fantasy* series has arrived in *Monster Hunter: World* for a monstrous crossover. He'll be a challenge to take down.



Stream dream
Ninja recently passed ten million followers on Twitch making him the first streamer to break that barrier. We're envious.



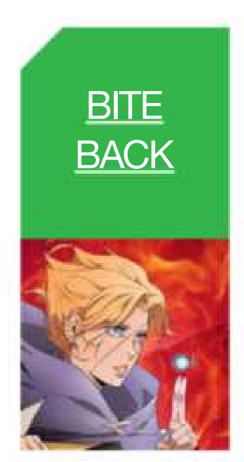
Are we there yet?
Bioware has said it's still working on *Dragon Age* and *Mass Effect*, but aren't showing us anything. Give us a teaser!



Forced Download
Thinking of buying *Spyro Reignited* in September? Be warned: Only the first game is on the disc, you'll have to download the others.

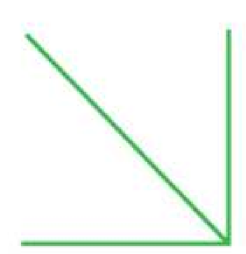


BITE BACK



Dracula's bat for more

New series of Castlevania anime comes to Netflix this October



RIGHT The show isn't afraid to explore the dark side of humans, which caused Dracula to lash out in the first place.

Last year Netflix surprised us with an anime version of the famous *Castlevania* series that was met with a great reception despite only being four episodes long. Now it's returning just in time for Halloween with season two. It's not a direct adaptation of any of the games in the series, being more of a reimagining of some of the more prominent parts of the overarching plot. It's also very bloody and violent, so be wary if you think this is 'just a cartoon'.

While season one set the scene for Dracula's revenge on humanity thanks to some priests burning his beloved human wife at the stake, series two will focus on the form that revenge takes, and how our heroes will stop it. Now that monster hunter Trevor Belmont, mage Sypha Belnades, and Dracula's son Alucard have teamed up, they'll have to start making a move on Dracula's hordes and castle in an effort to stop his bloody plans.

Blood lust

The second series is set to be eight episodes—twice as many as the first—and sees Dracula gain some generals for his vampire army in his quest for eternal night and complete domination of humankind. So there will be some more recognizable faces, rather than just hordes of monsters.

Luckily, Dracula's son doesn't agree with what he's doing, and has half-vampire powers that should give the heroes a much-needed boost in power to defeat him. If the first series is anything to go by then we're all in for a fun, bloody, and schlocky time. ■

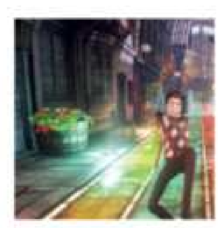
Watch the new series on Netflix from October 26.





BARREL WATCH

GAMING'S FAVORITE PROP RATED BY OUR RESIDENT COOPER



We Happy Few
Sometimes a poor barrel may find itself injured or mutilated, but that doesn't mean its life is over. It can still make the world prettier as a home for flowers.



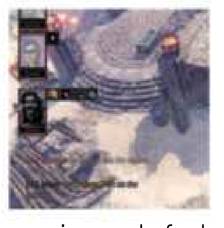
Dead Cells
Speaking of being pretty, our rotund friends always make for excellent set-dressing in dungeons of any type, as demonstrated by this beautiful example.



Shenmue 1 + 2 HD rerelease
These have seen better days, though to be fair they have sat unloved for almost 20 years. Time to give them a makeover and a big hug.



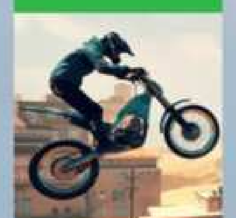
The Walking Dead: Final Season
The good thing about metal drums is that they're completely zombie-proof, as they have no blood, so make for excellent hiding spots.



Divinity: Original Sin II
Those paint markings don't meet regulation safety requirements for toxic substances. A word with their manager, please: This is unsafe for adventurers.


SHORMX
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SECURITY





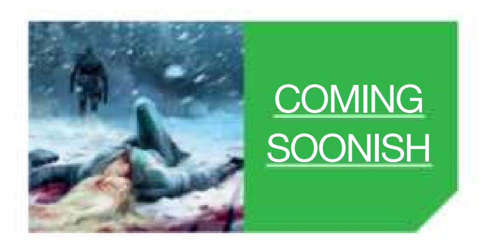
Riding high

Motocross mishaps are coming back thanks to Trials Rising

Accidents happen, but few games encourage the hilarity of it quite like the *Trials* series, and finally it's returning to Xbox once more thanks to upcoming entry *Rising*. Getting from A to B via a motocross bike has never been this disastrous but fun. It's a simple enough premise: You have to navigate a series of obstacles to reach the end in the fastest time, with each track getting more and more complicated and the risk of dying via exploding barrels increasing as you progress.

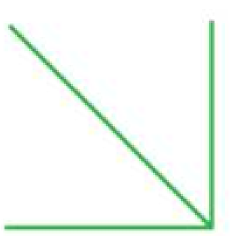
If it all goes wrong and your limbs flop about uselessly after a collision with a steel girder, that's okay, it's all part of the experience, and is quickly fixed thanks to super-fast resets that will have you back in the saddle in no time. In fact, to make it through a track unscathed is practically unheard of—if you haven't smacked into a bridge or fudged a jump at some point, you deserve some kind of medal of honor. Previous games have been simple yet addictive, and we can't wait to have more of it in our grubby little mitts. ■

You'll be able to fall over repeatedly in early 2019.



Kept you waiting, huh?

Metal Gear Solid movie director celebrates the game's 31st anniversary with new art



News about the upcoming *Metal Gear Solid* movie that was first announced back in 2012 has not been particularly forthcoming in recent years. In fact it's been so silent that we had assumed that the project wasn't actually happening any more, so when director Jordan Vogt-Roberts recently posted a 31st anniversary project on Twitter that confirmed the movie was still on its way we were surprised. Though we guess sneaking up out of nowhere is to be expected from a movie all about a hero of the stealth world.

During this year's San Diego Comic-Con, Vogt-Roberts announced that he's been creating 31 pieces of new art that captured the spirit of the *Metal Gear* universe. While he was quick to clarify that this wasn't officially from the game series or movie he's working on, to cover his legal bases, he did confirm that more details would be on the way soon and in the meantime we got a good look at his inspirations.

The art covers all time periods from the series, and includes snippets of Snake and other famous characters in the heat of battle, but others are pure scene-setting—capturing the essence of just why so many fans fell in love with the series in the first place. One image is of the Metal Gear Rex mech standing over vibrant green rice paddies as workers continue about their business. It's great to picture such a hulking mechanical monstrosity existing in everyday life.

Codec call

The movie itself will have its work cut out for it to make sense of a decades-long and famously complicated plot. Vogt-Roberts has said that it won't be a direct remake of any one game,

> **"Vogt-Roberts has said that it won't be a direct remake of any one game"**

which makes sense as there's just far too much to cover to do it justice; instead it will be an adaptation, but not one that flies too far away from the source material. This seems like the smartest move to us, as faithful recreations of games never come across well in cinema (sorry *Tomb Raider*), so something looser has a far better chance of succeeding by focusing on capturing an aspect of the game's core.

He's also been consulting with Hideo Kojima to make sure he captures the spirit of it properly. Of course, Kojima being the auteur he is, he left Vogt-Roberts with this sage piece of advice: "Do what I would do, betray your audience." Um, thanks Kojima… we think. But perhaps he's just saying that as he no longer has anything to do with the *Metal Gear* series after his split with Konami, he's no longer involved with his wonderfully complex brainchild.

Unfortunately the movie is still quite a way off, and there's still no sign of a cast list—although one piece of concept art we saw featured Christian Bale's likeness for Snake. However, the script sounds like it's mostly complete now, so surely it's just a matter of time before more solid details are nailed down and production can begin. ■

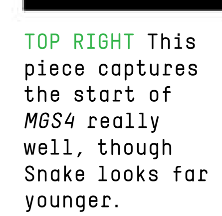
Stay on the lookout for more details in future issues of **OXM.**

Casting call

While an artist did draw Christian Bale as Snake, it's unlikely the role will go to him—artists will often base their work on someone they like, but who might not necessarily actually be involved in the project. Personally we like the idea of Hugh Jackman taking the roll as a slightly older, gruff Snake.







TOP RIGHT This piece captures the start of *MGS4* really well, though Snake looks far younger.

BOTTOM RIGHT Gray Fox stalks a hallway—he'd be an amazing misunderstood movie villain.

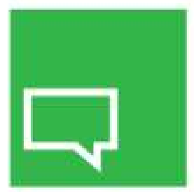
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HOT TOPIC

WHAT VIDEOGAMES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE ADAPTED FOR THE BIG SCREEN?



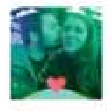
"*Life Is Strange*. The emotion, character development and plot twist would translate great to the small screen." **Aaron Smith**



"Redo *Assassin's Creed*. The film was shocking but I think it could be rebooted again but done properly." **Tyler Meredith**



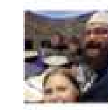
"None. When has it ever done justice to the game experience? Despite some shared DNA they don't transfer well." **Jacob Burns**



"*Devil May Cry*. I see David Leitch making a good director since *DMC* is like halfway between John Wick and Deadpool." **Matt James**



"A game set in the *Fallout* world would be awesome, but it would have to be its own story and setting." **Daniel Boult**



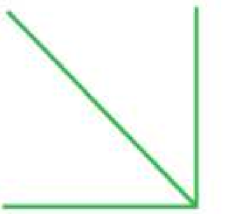
"I'd go with *Red Dead Redemption*. It's got a great main character and plenty of story with action." **James Ashcroft**

Agree with the above? Have your own ideas? Tell us at facebook.com/oxmuk

Steve Hogarty is...

The Fixer

Steve addresses the problems of **multiplayer voice chat**



When I was a young boy, I lived in a hole in the ground. I say "hole", but it was more of a wet divot, a kind of dirty little nest that I had scratched into the earth with my bare hands and teeth. At night I would cover myself in dead leaves and discarded crisp packets to keep warm—China had yet to invent global warming—and each morning I would spring from my mucky bed as if born again, refreshed and ready to face another miserable day in the endless sprawling woods that I called my home.

While this might sound like a "glamping staycation" by today's standards, for me and every other millennial it was the brutal reality of growing up in the tech-sparse wastelands of the 1990s, where instead of messaging a friend on WhatsApp to see if they wanted to hang out, you just showed up on their front doorstep as though you were some kind of a murderous psychopath. It was the kind of unhinged behavior that would get you arrested today.

Here and now in 2018, hardly any of our communications are face to face, and if somebody shows up unannounced at your house it's almost certainly because they're about to rob you or ask you to vote for them. Instead we chat over the internet. Because whether you're sliding into someone's DMs or simply snapchatting them on a bebo, online is very much the place to be.

The problem

Which leads us to this week's gaming problem. Voice chat is the worst form of social interaction that there is. It's a worse social interaction than when a British tourist shouts "DONDE ESTA EL TESCO EXPRESS" at a confused Mexican woman. It's worse than when a dentist places razor sharp instruments in your mouth and then asks you how you think Brexit is going. It's worse than forgetting a friend's name, awkwardly calling him "captain", then having a second friend show up and ask to be introduced.



"Strangers can't be trusted to speak to one another online"

Voice chat in games is 80% the labored breathing of a teenager from one of those dusty states where the houses are made of bits of scrap metal and hub caps, and 18% incisive commentary on what your mom gets up to when she's out of the house. Of the remaining 2%, about half is useful information about teamwork, and the rest is just this one weird guy who's clearly stoned and only speaks Romanian.



Yet despite its shortcomings, speaking to other players has become so typical of multiplayer gaming that angrily shouting about ammo is now the most recognizable stereotype we've got. "Frustrated guy on sofa with Xbox pad and headset" has appeared in everything from makeover shows to television ads about slow broadband speeds. Voice chat represents gaming.

The solution

This one's an easy fix. Everybody disables their microphones, and relies on the international language of emotes and good game design to do all the communicating for us. We're already far along this path, with games like *Rocket League* letting you trigger basic phrases with a few button presses, and *Overwatch* automatically flagging players who need healing without them needing to say a thing.

Developers are also becoming increasingly mindful of deaf players, or players who don't want to use their voice when playing games, and creating games that can be played without ever having to utter, or hear, a single word.

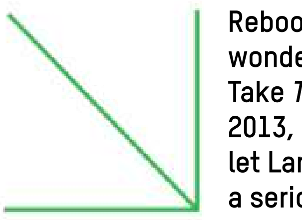
Accessibility issues aside, less online chatter can only be a good thing. If the last three years have taught us anything, it's that strangers can't be trusted to speak to one another on the internet, lest they start sharing their terrible thoughts and ideas. Switch off voice chat, and we can take a bold step towards a quieter, more civilized way to play games online. If anybody needs me I'll be in my hole. ■

Steve also writes for *City A.M.*

Daniella Lucas is...

The Traveler

Dani revisits the world of DmC because Capcom won't



Reboots can be wonderful things. Take *Tomb Raider* in 2013, for example: It let Lara Croft become a serious protagonist away from the voyeuristic, *Playboy* trappings she went through in the '90s. Reboots give old games a chance for beloved characters and worlds to become relevant once more. Unfortunately, Ninja Theory's *Devil May Cry* reboot, *DmC*, didn't fare as well. Capcom trusted it with its niche-but-stylish action series in an attempt to revitalize it. Focusing on a young, punkish Dante as he fights demons, it was critically very well received. Series fans, however, weren't as pleased.

This new, brunette take on Dante was too different from the white-haired original, so received a backlash because of it. The game also suffered because it came out right near the end of the last generation of consoles when people were already looking to the Xbox One, so it didn't sell as well as expected. Capcom has now dropped this rebooted world, completely sweeping it under the rug in favor of *Devil May Cry V*—a continuation of the original story. I haven't forgotten this unappreciated gem however, so I've decided to return to its world to see what gamers are losing out on.

Limbo City, the place where the majority of the game is set, has a New York-like feel to it thanks to the architecture, but it's even more dank and run down. The streets are covered in graffiti, and you're continuously watched by CCTV cameras. It's got the airs of a formally grand place that has fallen into disrepute, which is fitting considering the game is about dealing with the demons who have overrun the joint.

There are areas of brightness and frivolity such as Bellview Pier which houses the Funland Carnival, but there's a gaudiness to it. Again, that brash sense of taste fits the world perfectly even if it isn't pleasant—this is a place of excess and sin. The new Dante fits right in with his arrogant attitude and cheeky, punkish swagger. Instead of the original's ancient castles, this is a modern city for a modern hero full of modern evils like consumerism. It makes for a more grounded, realistic experience compared to the older games, as the environment is so relatable even if it is a fantastical farce.



"Food ads become messages that extol the virtues of gluttony"

Dark side

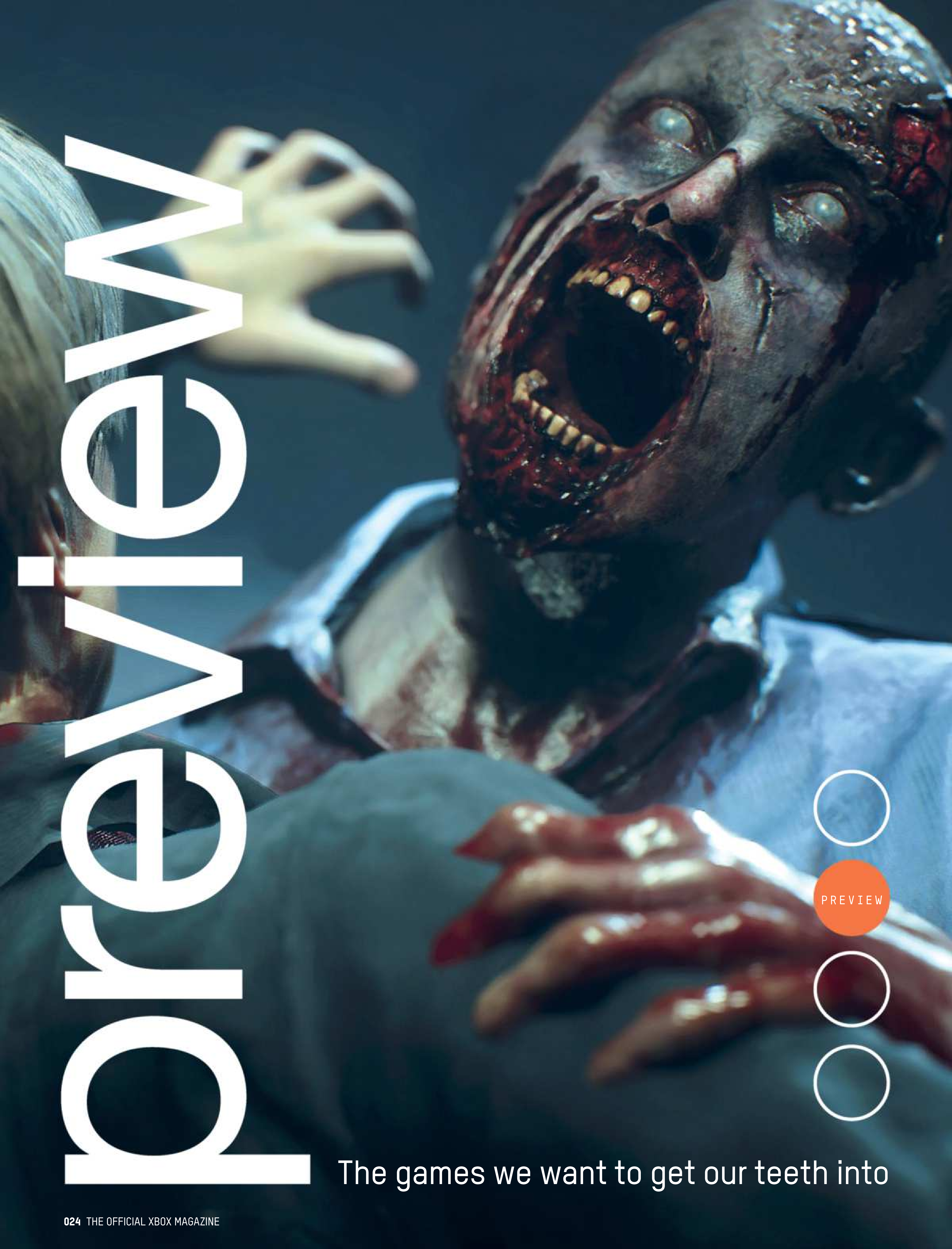
But where the game shines brightest is in its Limbo sections, where you're pulled into an alternate dimension that sits just alongside the human one. Full of demons, it's a twisted place where buildings jut out at odd, broken angles, and adverts show their true colors—food ads become messages that extol the virtues of gluttony, for example. It's a neat shift that showcases the depths of manipulation of the masses by the demons in control. The whole place can change unexpectedly around you as it's completely under big bad Mundus' full control. That constant shifting of the environment demonstrates just how strong the grip that demons have over Limbo and Limbo City really is.

Being the son of a demon and an angel, Dante gets to see the city from a unique perspective, unlike its ordinary citizens, who mill around a bit brainlessly, subconsciously broken by their surroundings. Again, this feels very much like it's on purpose as most of the city's occupants are under demon control, be that through pop drinks made from monster secretions or just the daily grind of constantly being watched by the unblinking eyes of the CCTV network.

It's a shame we'll probably never revisit Limbo City and its young Dante again, now that Capcom has returned to its older timeline. The city feels far more in keeping with the world and new lore that *DmC* was creating—it's a brilliantly designed location that deserved better than the hand it was dealt. It's an important slice of gaming history, and well worth visiting before it vanishes from people's memories forever. ■

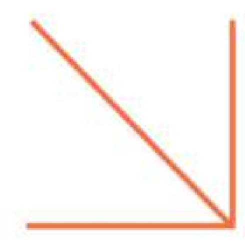


You can see more of Dani's gaming travels on Instagram: @daniellamlucas.



The games we want to get our teeth into

The only way to make *Resident Evil 2* less scary is to play as a giant block of tofu



OXM'S MOST WANTED

Dani's pick
Tunic
Of course I'm excited about the adorable little fox with his tiny sword. This game looks stunning, and I still can't wrap my head around the fact it's just one guy making it.

Adam's pick
Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice
I loved and played the hell out of the *Dark Souls* trilogy and as a big fan of Japanese history, specifically feudal Japan, *Sekiro* seems like it was made just for me.

Warren's pick
Resident Evil 2
A chance to once again step into the world of survival horror? Yep I'm well up for that. Let's hope Marv makes it through this remake... poor Marv.

Why are our backs pressed against all of the corridors as we navigate the office, you ask? Because we got a good look at **Resident Evil 2** (p26), and now we're too scared of what might appear over our shoulder if we don't. Sure, it makes getting around a little more complicated, but at least no zombies will be taking us by surprise. **Indivisible** is a beautiful-looking JRPG with Metroidvania-style gameplay, and we dip into its magical world on page 30. We're big fans of classic pen-and-paper RPG games, so we were excited to get some time with **Mutant Year Zero: Road To Eden** on page 36. We love the idea of running around a post-human Earth as anthropomorphic animals like an attitudinal duck. Game studio Dontnod have been super-busy lately, what with bringing us *Vampyr*, *The Awesome Adventures Of Captain Spirit*, and a *Life Is Strange* sequel all in the space of a year. They're not stopping there, and we have a first look at **Twin Mirror** on page 36. It's an intriguing game that looks more than a little *Twin Peaks*-ish to us. Finally, we got a look at FromSoftware's next punishingly challenging game **Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice** on p37. While the grappling hook looks fun, we're not sure about the whole skeletal arm thing, it'll be even more unlikely that anyone would want to hold our hand now.









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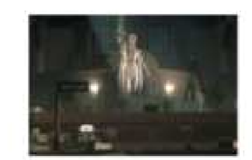
LEFT Shoot a zombie's limb, and it will detach—you can use this tactically to slow them down.

RIGHT Leon will be getting up close and personal with the zombies. Good job he's brought his knife.



This will be the first time that *Resident Evil 2* has been playable on an Xbox console







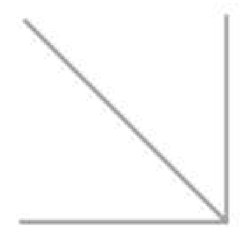


Resident Evil 2

We head back into Raccoon City and go hands on with everyone's favorite rookie

Adam Bryant

PUBLISHER CAPCOM **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** JANUARY 25 2019



MAIN Rookie cop Leon S Kennedy returns in the remake of the 1998 classic.





When we were told that we'd actually get up close to this highly anticipated remake, to step back into the shoes of Leon S Kennedy once more and roam the dark, bloody halls, and corridors of the Raccoon City Police Department, we were filled with an overwhelming sense of excitement and apprehension. Excitement, because we'd already spent three years itching to find out what Capcom had been getting up to, and apprehension, because we all have fond memories of the original game, and know all too well how difficult it can be to create a remake that meets everyone's expectations. It didn't take us long to realize that there was nothing to fear. Well, aside from the flesh-eating zombies lurking in the dark, that is.

We join a much younger and more naive Leon than the one we've come to know and love during his first day on the job as Raccoon City's latest police recruit. We're pretty sure the last thing he was expecting was to arrive in a city overrun by zombies in which death and destruction can be found at every turn. After meeting, and almost immediately being separated from, college student Claire Redfield, who's searching for her brother, Chris, Leon makes his way to the city's police station, and to what he thinks is relative safety.

This is where we take our first tentative steps and notice, aside from how gorgeous the game looks, that they've moved away from the fixed camera angles and tank controls of the original game and opted for a more modern over-the-shoulder free camera approach that was used in most of the later games. We then realized that the main hall's layout is different than we remember. The reception desk which was once situated towards the back of the hall has now been brought forward to a more sensible spot facing the front entrance, and the doors that you could enter previously are either locked or non-existent. Things are not as we remember. This is indicative of pretty much every room we explore, with each location sporting changes both large and small. But that's not all, the narrative beats have changed, too. In fact, although it retains the same dark foreboding mood and general gist of the story, most of what transpires during the demo never actually happened in the original. Compare this to the remake of the first game, which had similar visual changes, but where the story remained untouched and played out almost identically as it did originally. What resulted was of course a visually impressive recreation, but it was essentially the same old game. With the remake of *Resident Evil 2*, however, Capcom has gone all the way and in doing so offered up a brand new experience for old-school fans as well as newcomers, while at the same time retaining the original's essence.

"It's a new experience for old-school fans as well as newcomers"

Police gory

We don't hang around for long inside the main hall, and after checking the security camera feed and seeing a fellow officer in trouble, we head towards his location. We crawl under an emergency shutter door on the east side of the hall and into the



LEFT Police lieutenant Marvin Branagh is another returning character.

RIGHT Look at those perfect teeth, a real credit to dentistry.



It's been reported that characters Hunk and Tofu, as well as their mini-missions, will make a return

"The destruction of enemies is bloody, but dynamic and contextual"

PHOTO-GRAPHIC MEMORY

Despite all the changes that Capcom has made, there are plenty of things that have remained. One of which is the return of the photography dark room. You can interact with the processing area, so it's likely to function in the same way as it did in the original game, and give you the chance to develop various camera films you locate throughout the game. Let's just hope we don't have to search desks 50 times in order to find the films this time...





BELOW Raccoon City Police Department is under seige from the dead as the city burns.

darkness of the corridor beyond. With our handgun and flashlight primed, we cautiously push forward, the oppressive atmosphere closing in all around us. Eventually we hear the cries of a police officer and rush to his aid. Another emergency shutter blocks our path to him, but we pry it open just enough for him to shuffle through. Grabbing his hands, we begin to pull him through, but something on the other side catches up with him, and the man wails in agony. We attempt to pull him free, but it's no good. As the screams stop, we discover that the man has been torn in two. The camera lingers for a fraction longer than we're comfortable with on the poor guy's entrails. Capcom has most definitely not held back in the horror and gore department, depicting all the wet ugliness you can imagine. It's clear from this scene alone that it is taking full advantage of the graphical capabilities that the relatively new RE Engine, that was used in *Resident Evil 7*, provides. This is without a doubt the most gruesome *Resident Evil* to date.

This gruesomeness extends to the destruction of the enemies, too, which is just as bloody, but is dynamic and contextual. Immediately after the police officer dies, a zombie barges through the door and attacks us. In our panic we miss a bunch of shots, but finally land a clean headshot. In previous games this would have been enough to finish the zombie off, but all it did was blow a chunk of its head away, and it continues moving toward us. We experiment with shooting different parts of the zombie's body and, sure enough, if we shoot an arm or a leg, a couple of times it blasts the thing off. Apart from looking really grim, you'll be able to use this tactically to slow zombies down.

After wasting all of our bullets and getting ambushed by a bunch of other zombies, we run back to the main hall. As we crawl back under the emergency shutter from earlier, a zombie grabs our ankle. Thankfully trusty police lieutenant Marvin Branagh comes to the rescue and slams the shutter down on the monster's head. This is another example of narrative differences. In the original game Marvin is found slouched against some lockers looking worse for wear and hands you a key card. Here he saves us from a zombie attack and supplies us with a combat knife. He still looks pretty awful though.

Pure evil

The developers are doing an impressive job of retaining the same sense of horror and tension that made the original such a beloved classic, while at the same time adding elements to make the game feel fresh and keep you on your toes. A great example of this is when we obtain the combat knife and gain access to the west side of the hall. This area famously led to the iconic moment where we encountered the Licker monster for the first time. Leading up to the hallway, we anticipated catching a glimpse of the creature as it crawls past the window from the outside, but this doesn't occur. When we enter the corridor we experience something different. The Licker is nowhere to be seen; instead, two mutilated corpses are found, and large claw marks are gouged out of the walls. A clear indication that the Licker was here not too long ago. Anyone who has ever played the original game will immediately be taken out of their comfort zone, and any confidence they may have had will be washed away as they won't have a clue as to what lurks behind the next door. Despite the sheer amount of changes to the game though, at no point does it betray the original in any way. Instead it actually improves on it.

We're beyond excited for the return of *Resident Evil 2*, and everything we've seen so far has exceeded our expectations. Sadly we only got a chance to play as Leon during this demo, but you will get the opportunity, as in the original, to play a completely different campaign as Claire Redfield. And although we didn't complete any puzzles or crack any lock we saw plenty of opportunities to do so. Fear not, this game truly is classic *Resident Evil 2*. ■

ABOVE Going on an adventure! It's a good job Ajna is trained in martial arts.

RIGHT Keep your eyes peeled. There are plenty of secrets to be found in each location.





Indivisible started out on crowdfunding website Indiegogo and raised $2m in 57 days





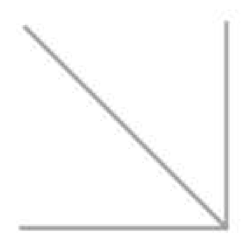


Indivisible

We get some hands-on time with Lab Zero's beautiful and magical RPG

Adam Bryant

PUBLISHER 505 GAMES **DEVELOPER** LAB ZERO GAMES
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** 2019



When you mix a Metroidvania style game with a traditional Japanese RPG battle system you're left with something rather special. At least that's what the developers behind 2D fighting game *Skull Girls* discovered with their latest title.

This 2D side-scrolling RPG follows the story of Ajna, a fiery but good-natured young girl who lives with her father on the outskirts of a remote village. After her village comes under attack from local warlords, she decides to go after them in the name of justice. She soon discovers that she possesses a special ability which allows her to absorb people into her being. These companions, called Incarnations, will join Ajna on a quest journey, and she can manifest them at will to help her in battle.

Apart for the gorgeous hand-drawn art, one of the most intriguing elements of *Indivisible* is the combat system, which is heavily inspired by the Japanese RPGs of old. During battle the party fights together as a whole, in much the same way as a single fighting game character would, with each of the four ABXY buttons corresponding to different attacks, in this case different characters and their abilities. You'll have up to four Incarnations joining you in battle at any given time. Each character is assigned to the button corresponding to their position. For example, the Incarnation at the top of the formation will be assigned to the Y button, and the Incarnation to the left will be assigned to the X button and so on. With 25 playable characters there will be plenty of ways in which you can customize your party.

Fighting spirit

Combat is deceptively simple, and offers various tactical options. Ajna and each of her companions have three different attacks, which can be performed by pressing their corresponding ABXY buttons on their own or combined with the up or down buttons. They also have three different super abilities, which are activated by holding the RB button and pressing the character's corresponding button up to three times. The super abilities become available once you've filled up your 'Iddie' meter, which consists of three bars, through fighting enemies. The more combos you do the faster the Iddie meter will fill. Each bar you fill will give you a more powerful version of a character's super ability. For example, take the Incarnation Razmi, who is the healer of the group. With one bar of the Iddie meter full she is able to heal one other Incarnation. With three bars full, she's able to heal the whole party. Each character does something different, and it's possible to combine their attacks by pressing different buttons simultaneously.

But it's not all about the combat. Every good RPG has an interesting story with exotic locations for you to explore and ways to develop your character. Thankfully, the world of *Indivisible* doesn't disappoint. You'll explore steampunk Victorian cities, deserts, jungles, mountains, subterranean cities inspired by Aztecs and Mayans, and more. By collecting gems, called Ringsels, you'll gain different abilities which will allow you to explore sections of the world.

This beautifully animated game has everything you would expect from a traditional RPG: a large cast of interesting characters, a kick-ass anime introduction cutscene, a wonderful world to explore, and a soundtrack by a famed Japanese composer. It's no surprise we're itching to play more. ■

"Gems will allow you to gain abilities and explore sections of the world"

INNER SPACE

The Inner Realm is a dimension that resides within Ajna and is where all of the Incarnations that you absorb reside. As you progress through the game and get more powerful, the inner realm will develop from a rock floating in a void, and blossom. This is also the place where you can save the game, level up both yourself and your Incarnations, and pick up quests.





There is a level in the game so difficult that only one person on the development team can complete it



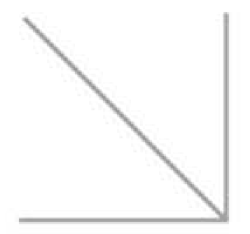
Trials Rising

Get addicted to punishment once again in everyone's favorite motorbike competition

Adam Bryant

PUBLISHER UBISOFT **DEVELOPER** REDLYNX/UBISOFT KIEV
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** FEBRUARY 2019





You've been down this track plenty of times before, failing over and over again in the most ridiculous ways imaginable, until after the 467th attempt and a little cry you finally reach the next checkpoint. You're relieved, your palms are sweaty, and you're psyching yourself up for the next stretch. It's punishing, but the sense of reward you get when you cross that finish line is like no other, so you keep coming back for more.

Trials is back in what Ubisoft describes as its most ambitious *Trials* game yet, and it's as soul-crushingly hard as ever. It's the usual set-up: Grab a motorbike and make your way to the end of a track while crossing an increasingly elaborate obstacle course intent on getting you to become best friends with the dirt in both horrific and hilarious ways. You'll get to compete in iconic locations around the world like the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Great Pyramids of Egypt, Mount Everest, and more. Online multiplayer, local co-op, and the track editor all make a return, along with some shiny new additions. Players who are particularly proud of their gear will now be able to customize their bikes or outfits, and share them with players online. You'll also get the chance to take on contracts from in-game sponsors that offer players new challenges, and handsomely rewards those that complete them.

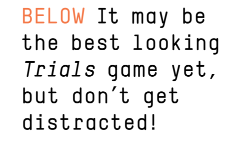
"If you're accelerating too much the rear wheel will start to glow"

White-knuckle riders

Not only that, but an interesting new local multiplayer feature is the tandem bike mode, which allows you to team up with another person and help (or hinder) each other to finish a course. This can be especially useful if you play with more experienced players. But you'll still need to work as a team to get the bike going. Both players share the acceleration, so in order for you to go at full speed you'll both need to hit the throttle. It's possible for one player to bail out of the tandem and allow the other player to continue without the other. We can already imagine the endless amounts of fun and frustration this will cause.

They've added other smaller elements, too. Like visual indicators as to what you're doing with the bike. If you're accelerating too much the rear wheel will start to glow. The same goes for braking: Brake too hard and the disc brakes will begin to glow. This helps you make informed decisions and refine your skills. They also have crowds to watch you as you complete the course to add to spectacle, and make it feel like a real competition. This improves the atmosphere of the levels and makes them feel more alive.

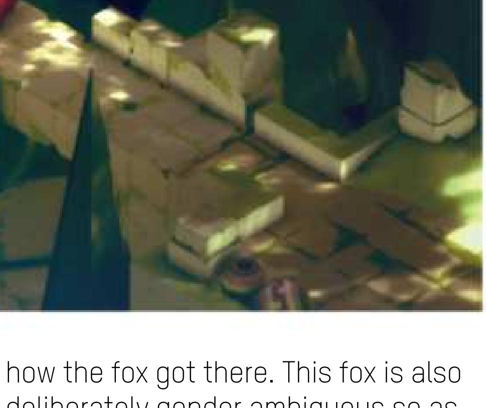
We had an absolute blast coming back to *Trials*, and once these blisters on our hands have gone we'll be ready for more. ■



BELOW It may be the best looking *Trials* game yet, but don't get distracted!



Andrew Shouldice spent three years developing the game all on his own before seeking help



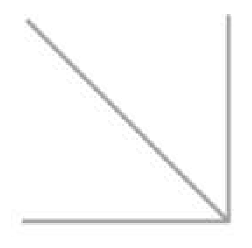


Tunic

There may be nothing more adorable than this tiny fox on a big adventure

Adam Bryant

PUBLISHER FINJI **DEVELOPER** ANDREW SHOULDICE
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** 2018



Let's address the elephant in the room shall we? The comparison to the *The Legend Of Zelda* series is clear, specifically the very first game. A green tunic-clad character wakes up on the beach in a world they don't quite understand, and possibly don't belong in, and they head out on an adventure exploring the countryside, fighting monsters and finding secrets.

Yeah, it sounds awfully familiar, but that's pretty much where the comparison ends as *Tunic* is less about solving puzzles and more about exploring this strange and wonderful world. So you're not going to be spending anywhere near as much time figuring out how to progress by pushing blocks around. The combat is a little more complex, too, with the addition of a stamina bar and a combat roll.

Obvious Link

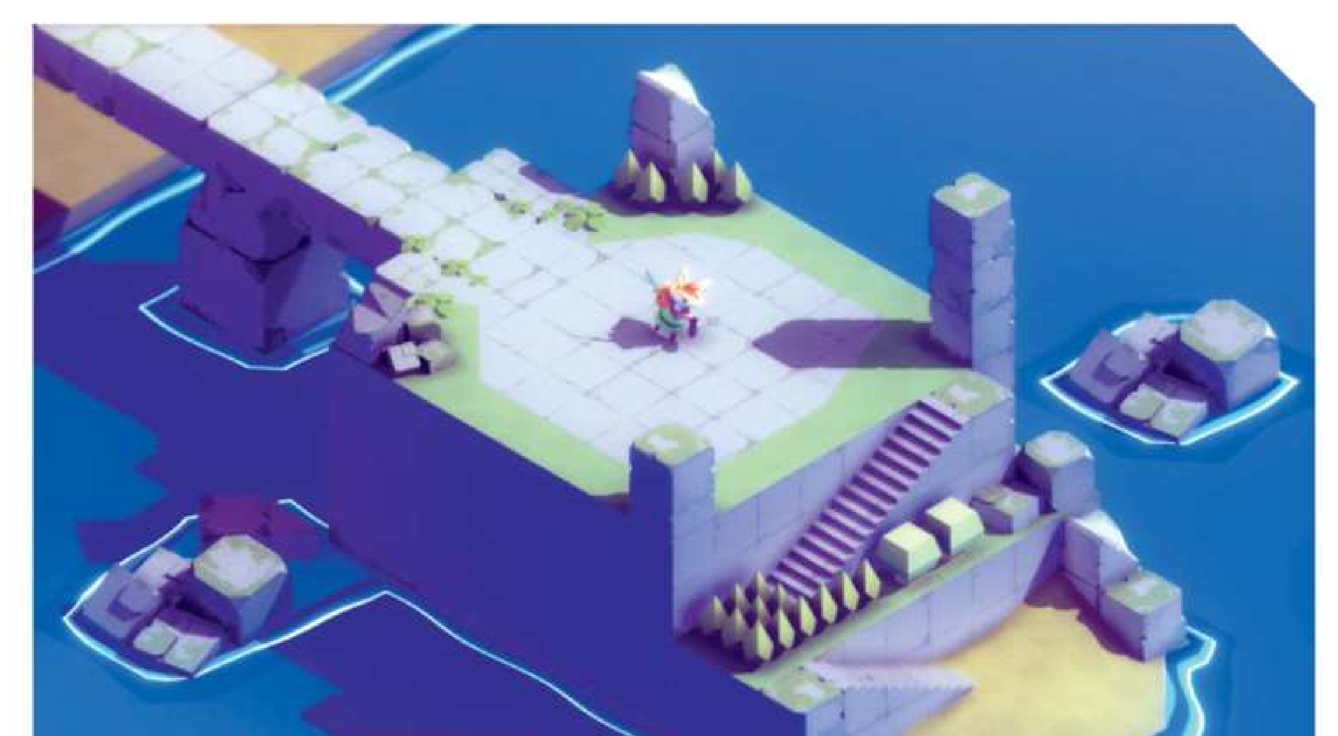
The premise of this isometric action adventure is deliberately vague. You're simply a small fox in a big world out to discover and explore, and you're left to make up your own mind as to how the fox got there. This fox is also deliberately gender ambiguous so as to help players relate to it more.

To help you along the way and gain knowledge of how to play the game and how the world works, you'll stumble upon seemingly illegible pages from what appear to be pages of an ancient instruction manual. The graphics and icons contained on these pages will help you discern what the page means, and will reveal more about the world and how to perform certain actions. For example, early on in the game you'll find a page that teaches you that if you dodge and attack in just the right way you'll be able to perform a special attack that can get around an enemy's shield. Some of these pages will tell you some fairly basic information, but later in the game there may be more profound discoveries about the world. This is a wonderfully novel way of making you feel just as new to this adventure and world as the fox is. The game tries its best to make you feel like you don't belong by making everything so unfamiliar.

"There's a lot of story and history for those that wish to find it"

The world is in ruins, and it's a fairly lonely place for such a cute little fox, but it's a great place for adventurers to dig a little deeper and see that there is more to it than meets the eye. There's a lot of story and history for those that wish to find it. Despite the fact that you're roaming around a fairly dangerous and unknown place and fighting enemies, it's a surprisingly beautiful and relaxing game. This is accompanied by an equally emotive soundtrack. We can't wait to join this fox on its adventure and discover more about the world of *Tunic* when it's released later this year. ■

BELOW We're unsure as to why anything would want to attack something so cute.



ABOVE You'll only be able to have three players in your party at any given time.

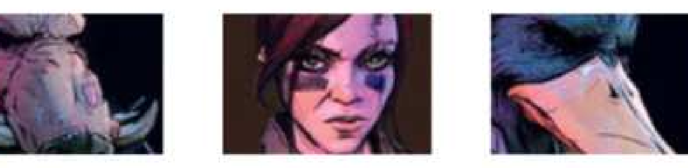
RIGHT Who ever said surviving in a post-apocalyptic wasteland was going to be pretty?

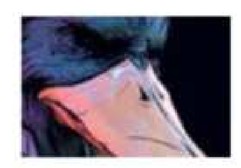


To help, the team were given the original design manuscripts of the Mutant pen and paper game







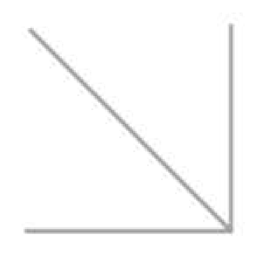


Mutant Year Zero: Road To Eden

Wandering the wasteland with anthropomorphic animals has never been so much fun

Adam Bryant

PUBLISHER FUNCOM **DEVELOPER** THE BEARDED LADIES
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** 2018





KILL BOT

Med-bots will quickly become your worst nightmare. During combat, once you've taken out an enemy, these pesky robots will perk up and quickly make their way across the map to revive them, making your life that much harder. If you're not careful they can revive every enemy you've killed. Taking out these bastards should always be top priority.

We've seen an influx of videogames adapted from pen and paper role-playing games as of late. There's the eldritch horror detective game *Call Of Cthulhu*, the neon-soaked RPG *Cyberpunk 2077*, and now, from developers The Bearded Ladies, comes *Mutant Year Zero: Road To Eden*.

In this tactical-adventure game set in a post-human Earth (thanks to humanity getting a little trigger happy with the old nuclear switch), you play as an eclectic team of mutants that include, among others, a duck with an attitude problem, a mutated human, and a brutish boar. Story details are scant, but it appears that you'll be roaming the wasteland with your motley crew of misfits in the hope of finding the legendary haven of 'Eden'.

Exploration in the game plays similarly to Japanese RPGs. You're free to go about the world to gather companions, discover secrets, and find items that will help you on your journey. The combat on the other hand takes heavy inspiration from *XCOM* with a turn-based, tactical combat system.

Before heading into combat you'll want to scout out the environment first. Stealth plays an important role, which is no surprise given that some of the developers are ex IO Interactive staff, and worked on the *Hitman* series. Not only is it possible to get the drop on enemies, you can completely circumvent enemy confrontations if you're extra stealthy. Once you've entered stealth mode, you can switch between each of your characters to position them around the environment, and set up the perfect ambush. As enemies come within range you can make your move, and gain a pre-emptive strike. However, if the enemy sees you they'll be the ones gaining the upper hand.

"You can play as a duck with an attitude problem or a brutish boar"

Quacking shot

During combat you get two action points, which can be spent in a variety of ways. The standard being to move to a location and perform an action, or to simply use both points to increase your movement range to cover more ground. But there's a wide range of abilities and actions available to you that offer different tactical options. If you're not in a position where you can attack your enemy, you can have your characters enter 'Overwatch' mode. This will allow you to take shots at any enemy that comes out of cover and finds themselves in your line of sight.

Each character has access to their own set of mutations, which will offer certain perks during combat. For example, the 'Gunslinger' ability allows you to attack multiple enemies using a single attack point. Or another called 'Frog Legs' lets you jump large distances to avoid being cornered by your enemies.

The environments are completely destructible, too, and you can use this to your advantage during combat. If an enemy is trying to hide inside an upper level of a building, you can throw a grenade and deny them any cover that they may have had, while dealing a lot of damage to them in the process.

When you're not taking out ghouls, you'll find yourself at the Ark, which acts as the central hub of the game. It's here that you'll wind down between missions, level up your characters, and pick up quests. As you venture out into the world, called The Zone, you'll pick up certain items that may help develop the Ark and make it a better place for everyone.

We've only spent a short time with the game, but with its combination of RPG exploration and tactical combat it's already shaping up to be one of our favorites of 2018. ■

Dontnod holds regular 'Dontnod Days' in which the team can work on whatever they want provided it connects to the current project

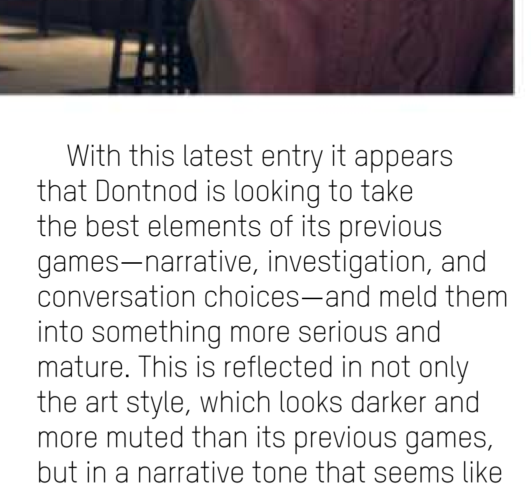


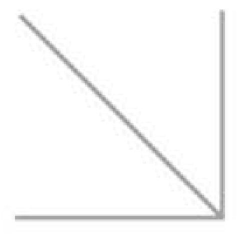
Twin Mirror

With yet another game on the horizon, Dontnod is on a roll

Adam Bryant

PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO **DEVELOPER** DONTNOD
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** 2019





Dontnod certainly isn't messing around: First we get supernatural adventure game *Vampyr*, then a short but heart-melting tale in *The Awesome Adventures Of Captain Spirit*, and later this year we'll see the release of the much anticipated sequel to *Life Is Strange*. In the space of a year we've seen the release of three games from the French development studio, so it comes as a surprise that it'll be ready to serve up yet another narrative-driven adventure game next year.

Twin Mirror is a story-driven psychological thriller where you play as Sam, an investigative journalist recovering from a recent break-up. Sam returns home to the fictional town of Basswood, West Virginia, to attend the funeral of his best friend who also just so happens to be a journalist. But in true Dontnod fashion, things take a turn for the worse as Sam wakes up in a hotel room to discover his shirt covered in someone else's blood. Confused and with no recollection of the previous night, Sam heads out to investigate and uncover the truth.

"There is more to this game than being simply a mystery thriller"

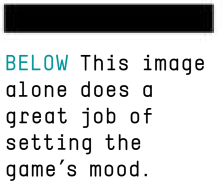
With this latest entry it appears that Dontnod is looking to take the best elements of its previous games—narrative, investigation, and conversation choices—and meld them into something more serious and mature. This is reflected in not only the art style, which looks darker and more muted than its previous games, but in a narrative tone that seems like something out of a television drama.

Self-reflection

Although you'll be predominantly investigating by talking to the people of Basswood and exploring the environment, there is more to the game than it being simply a mystery thriller. This will be a much deeper and more existential title than anything we've seen from the studio and you'll be faced with themes of acceptance and of coming back home. The main aim of this is to take you on an emotional journey, and for you to feel in control of that journey.

All of the decisions you make during the game, be it in conversation choices or through how you interact with the environment, impact the game in some way. They don't simply dictate the ending you'll receive, of which there are many—instead the gameplay is tightly interwoven with the narrative. Although it's not saying too much, Dontnod is promising innovative gameplay that will be directly linked with the narrative.

Dontnod has a knack for creating compelling story-driven games, and we don't expect *Twin Mirror* to be any different. Despite releasing so many games in such a short amount of time, it doesn't seem that Dontnod is suffering from any sort of burnout. ■



BELOW This image alone does a great job of setting the game's mood.



The game will not feature a multiplayer mode. So no invading of other people's worlds

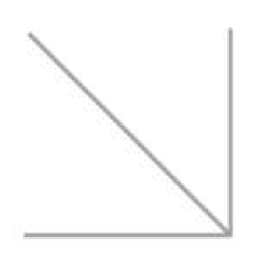
Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice

Stealth and resurrection in feudal Japan. We're not in Lordran anymore

Adam Bryant

PUBLISHER ACTIVISION **DEVELOPER** FROMSOFTWARE
FORMAT XBOX ONE **ETA** 2019





When FromSoftware's name came up on screen during the announcement trailer for *Sekiro* at this year's E3, the audience held their collective breaths in anticipation, followed by a mass raising of eyebrows when Activision's name appeared immediately after it. Everyone's first reaction was that this was going to be another *Souls*-like game, but if Activision's involvement didn't spell out that this was going to be an altogether different title, then the lush green forests glistening in the rain and beautiful vistas of swaying pampas grass fields shining under the moonlit sky should have.

Set in 16th century feudal Japan, during the Sengoku era, you play as a shinobi in the service of a young lord. This was a time of near-constant conflict and warfare, and during a battle with a member of the rival Ashina clan, the boy is captured and your arm is lopped off. Lucky for you. your arm is replaced with what the developers are calling a Shinobi Prosthetic. This prosthetic arm hides a bunch a tricks, one of which is a grappling hook that allows you to traverse the environment with relative ease. With your new toy you set out to save the young lord.

"The majority of your encounters will take place face-to-face with your opponent"

Apart from the setting, *Sekiro* sets itself apart from its *Dark Souls* kin in multiple ways. Firstly, you won't get to create your own character. This is a character-based story. There's no class-based system, and you won't be leveling your character up and assigning points to various stats.

Ninja warrior

As a shinobi, you'll utilize covert methods like sneaking under floorboards and jumping across rooftops to infiltrate areas and kill your enemies. The majority of your encounters, however, will take place face-to-face with your opponent.

The Stamina and Poise stats of the *Souls*' games has been replaced with Posture, which both you and the enemy possess. Fighting reduces this Posture, and once it's been whittled down you're stunned. This can leave you or your opponent open to devastating attacks. You'll need to master combat in order to survive.

When you die, which will be a lot, you won't immediately be transported back to a previous checkpoint, instead you'll resurrect yourself on the spot and return to the fight. This can be done multiple times before being returned to a previous checkpoint and can be used as a combat tactic.

This may be an action-adventure, and not an action-RPG like we're used to seeing from the studio, but as it's being directed by *Souls*' series creator Hidetaka Miyazaki, we have no doubt we'll get nothing less than a brutal, challenging experience with an in-depth story to discover. ■



BELOW Time your blocks perfectly and you'll greatly reduce your opponent's Posture.

roundup





THIS MONTH, THE BRITISH WINTER, OCCULT-DABBLING NAZIS, FLAMBOYANT WRESTLERS, AND MORE **DANIELLA LUCAS**

VIGOR



PUBLISHER BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE **DUE** 2019

A recent closed beta gave a little more insight into how this survival game will work. Rounds are meant to be kept fairly tight, forcing you to move closer to other players by having a cloud of radiation which funnels you all closer together. The maps might be smaller than in *DayZ*, but they're also incredibly dense—full of buildings to skulk between and scavenge items from.

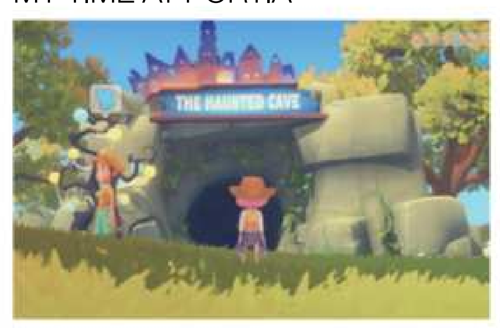
FORZA HORIZON 4



PUBLISHER MICROSOFT **DEVELOPER** PLAYGROUND GAMES **DUE** OCTOBER 2

A developer stream provided a closer look at the weather in this impressive-looking racer, showcasing everything a British winter has to offer. The world will open up further as bodies of water freeze, revealing extra tracks to race around. The further north on the map you are, the deeper the snow you'll get, whereas further south you'll deal with frost and wetter roads.

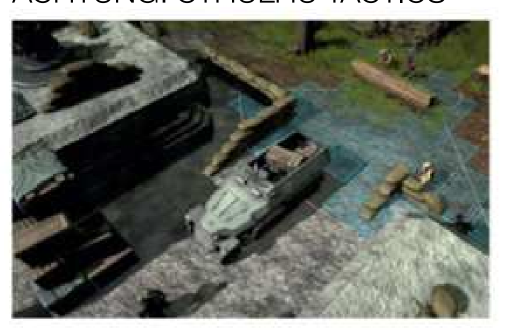
MY TIME AT PORTIA



PUBLISHER TEAM17
DEVELOPER PATHEA GAMES **DUE** 2018

This gentle farming sim has been in early access for a while now, and has been receiving regular updates in preparation for the full release later this year on Xbox One. It's expanded far beyond its humble crafting beginnings already, adding a factory that you can build to automate certain processes, and even new areas such as a spooky haunted cave.

ACHTUNG! CTHULHU TACTICS



PUBLISHER RIPSTONE GAMES
DEVELOPER AUROCH DIGITAL **DUE** TBC

In this newly announced Lovecraft-inspired game with a twist, you're tasked with fighting Nazis who have been dabbling with the occult in an alternate WWII setting. It's based on a successful board game of the same name made by Modiphius Entertainment, and will play like a turn-based strategy game with hero characters that have different specializations.

WWE 2K19



PUBLISHER 2K SPORTS
DEVELOPER YUKE'S **DUE** 5 OCTOBER

Can we get a "Wooooo!" up in here for all of the Ric Flair fans? Turns out, yes you can, thanks to a special edition of this year's WWE 2K title. It will contain everything that the deluxe edition does, but with a few more exclusive extras including a WWE Hall of Fame Replica ring, a plaque that has a piece of fabric from Ric Flair's iconic robes, and a pair of art cards. Wooooo indeed.

NICKELODEON KART RACERS



PUBLISHER GAMEMILL ENTERTAINMENT
DEVELOPER GAMEMILL ENTERTAINMENT
DUE 23 OCTOBER

Beep, beep—move over *Forza*, SpongeBob is coming through. This combines iconic cartoon series such as *Rugrats*, *Hey Arnold!*, and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* in a chaotic kart racing game that looks perfect for kids and the young at heart. The final thing will feature 12 different series, although not all of them have been shown.

FOR MORE PREVIEWS AND THE LATEST GAMES CHECK OUT GAMESRADAR.COM/OXM

XBOX ONE & WINDOWS 10 EXCLUSIVE



Microsoft Studios

TEEN
T
ESRB

Crude Humor
Use of Alcohol
Violence







THIS IS SPAR

ASSASSIN'S CREED ODYSSEY PROVES THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOMER AS IT CRASHES INTO ANCIENT GREECE AS A FULL-BLOWN RPG

LOUISE BLAIN


T A



Nothing is true; everything is permitted. The Creed mantra that has guided the history-hopping franchise for the last 11 years. Well, while it kept Ezio, Bayek, Edward, and co on the right track, Ubisoft itself has clearly taken the Creed to heart like a well-aimed arrow.

Assassin's Creed Odyssey isn't just the first *AC* not to have any *actual Assassins*, there's no sign of the iconic hidden blade, you've got two different characters to choose from, full-blown decision trees, and even romance options. Going hands-on on Xbox One X proves that everything truly is permitted in Ancient Greece, even the transformation of the franchise into a full-on RPG.

First off. *That* choice. Before you even make your way to 431BC—yes, this all takes place a mere four centuries before *Origins*—you've got the small matter of choosing between Spartan mercenaries Kassandra or Alexios. If you're howling that that's not how the Animus works, Ubi has an answer ready. The DNA here is seriously fried, given how old it is and that means it can be either one of these two Greek 'misthios'. See? *Science*. The pair are thus both fair game and, importantly, whoever you choose, you'll get exactly the same game, choices, romance potential, and chances to dive from absurdly high viewpoints with an eagle cry echoing in your ears. What a relief.

Landing on the Greek island of Delos as Kassandra, *Odyssey* is immediately seriously easy on the eyes, with sparkling beautiful white beaches and azure seas. The Creed's historical worlds have been juicy eye candy for years, but even this small slice of Greece is glowing and alive.

Town streets bustle, smoke drifts lazily into the cerulean sky, palm trees deliver some much-needed shade, and *is that a shark circling in the blue?* While those who played *Origins* will feel right at home—Kassandra's eagle Ikarus happily soars into the sky to check the lay of the land—there are some important changes to address before you go picking any fights. Yes, that's a spear in her left hand, and no, it doesn't matter that it looks a bit broken.

ABOVE Ancient Greece hasn't looked this beautiful since 404BC.

RIGHT Of course, there's still a bit of stealth assassination involved.

Spear review

As inherited family heirlooms go, you could do a lot worse than the broken Spear of Leonidas. Where previous Creeds have largely kept Assassins well away from the godlike Ancient Artefacts from Those Who Came Before, *Odyssey* hands you the

CREED ALL ABOUT IT

The latest Assassin's Creed game is also the earliest. Here we present a historical timeline of the series to date…



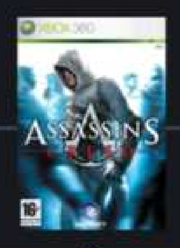
ASSASSIN'S CREED ODYSSEY
The Ancient Greek action is based on the Peloponnesian war between Sparta and Athens.

431-404BC



ASSASSIN'S CREED ORIGINS
Ancient Egypt is the backdrop for Bayek's fight against The Order of Ancients.

49-43BC



ASSASSIN'S CREED
Master assassin Altair Ibn-La'Ahad is operating in the Holy Land during the Third Crusade.

1191



weapon of King Leonidas himself, and tells you to have at it. The spear means that instead of Bayek's trusty shield, both Kassandra and Alexios carry this in their left hand. While the lack of protection means significantly more dodging in combat and the new addition of a counter option with a tap on the left bumper, it also means rather handy godlike super-powers. It's a fair trade. Mapped to the face buttons, these abilities rely on you filling up a gold bar on screen during combat before unleashing your fury on unsuspecting foes.

Like *Origins* before it, combat is frantic and unrelenting, meaning these powers come in exceptionally handy without being OP. This is where the gratifying *300*-flavored Spartan kick comes in, knocking enemies flying across the map at an opportune moment, but there are plenty of equally useful and satisfying moves. Find the perfect moment for a shield break, and Kassandra happily yanks away a foe's only source of protection, before clobbering them around the face with it and tossing it away.

A self-heal option comes in exceptionally handy too, but that's only the beginning. Just like *Origins*, as you level up, abilities and skills unlock, letting you personalize your fighting style to match your favorite weaponry. An Incredible Hulk-style ground smash between sword swings that sends soldiers tumbling? Oh, go on. Despite these super powers, combat never feels like a guaranteed win, making every battle an exhilarating and tense exercise in defence and attack.

It takes a while to get used to these new abilities, but an even bigger surprise is an *AC* cutscene stopping for you to have input. It's taken more than a decade, but decision-making in *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* is constant. Who to side with. Who to romance. Whether to steal in front of townsfolk or tow the line. Entire quests open and close. Branching dialogue results in new ways to play, and a heart next to a reply option indicates the way to a character's softer side that *isn't* the thin skin above their carotid artery.

Every decision matters here, and *Odyssey* has a clear idea of right and wrong. Murder and steal, and mercenaries will hunt you down. An upgraded version of *Origins*' Phylakes, these hired hitmen and women want their bounty, and that means your body hitting the ground. There's even a choice in how to deal with them.

ABOVE Kassandra fights with the broken but magical spear of King Leonidas in her left hand.





"Every decision matters here and Odyssey has a clear idea of right and wrong"



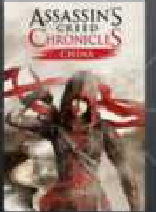
ASSASSIN'S CREED II
Assassin Ezio Auditore begins his Renaissance adventures in Florence.
1476-1499



ASSASSIN'S CREED BROTHERHOOD
Ezio's second outing moves the action to Rome, where he faces the Borgias.
1499-1507



ASSASSIN'S CREED REVELATIONS
Ezio di Auditore da Firenze heads off to Constantinople for his final outing.
1511



ASSASSIN'S CREED CHRONICLES: CHINA
Ezio's protege Shao Jun is platforming in Imperial China.
1526-1532

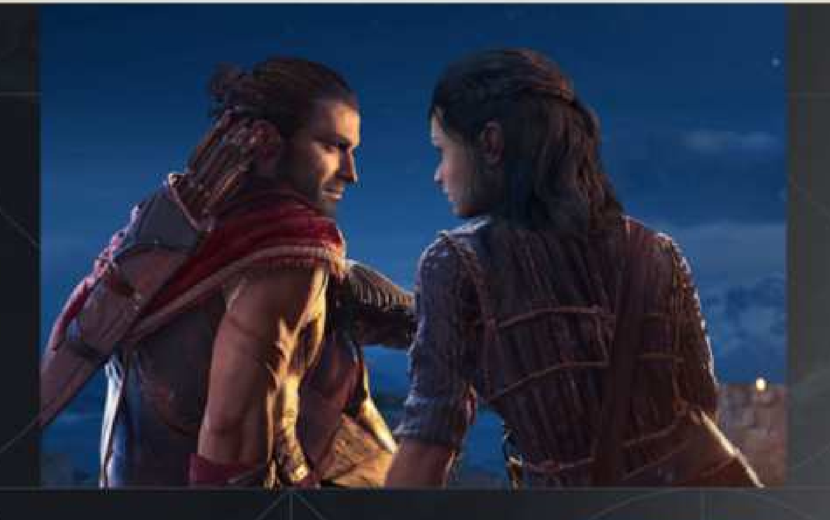
Sure, you could engage in hand to hand combat, but you could always murder the foes who set the bounty, or pay it off in full from the menu screen, or even sneak up on your hunter, knock them out, and offer to let them join your crew.

Trireme come true

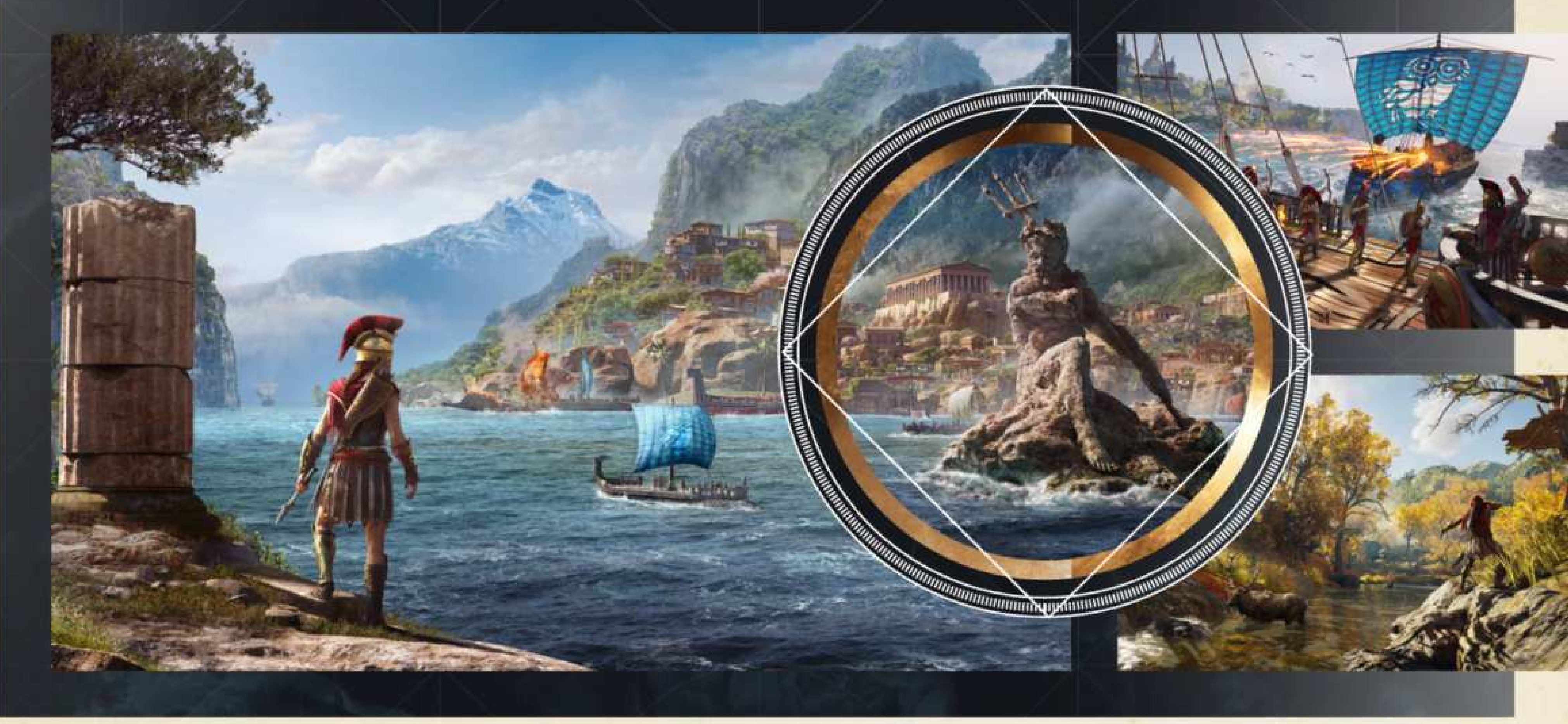
Yes, your *crew*. Where *Origins*' naval sequences were limited and (oddly) not replayable, the ocean of *Odyssey*'s Greece is just waiting for you to explore in your Greek trireme, The Adrestia. Dolphins leap alongside the hull as Kassandra takes to the sea on a mission to sink Athenian ships and, although you don't have the cannons of *Black Flag*, arrows fly on command from your crew, and you can ram unsuspecting ships. There's even an option for flaming arrows, stopping enemy vessels in their tracks as their sails go up in a blaze of orange and red. It's another dose of heady and spectacular naval combat as waves crash, and spilled oil coats the sea in liquid flames. Get close to an enemy ship, and the crew can toss javelins before boarding, gorily slaughtering the enemy and stealing their loot.

Like *Origins* before it, *Odyssey* is all about loot. Lady Luck returns to either smile on or smite you, but with the addition of armor as well as weaponry. Kassandra and Alexios' head, arms, chest, waist, and feet all need to be individually protected and upgraded, meaning you're constantly on the hunt for better gear. High level enemies drop quality goods, or you can find superior bits hidden inside well-protected camps and forts. Weaponry too has had an upgrade. There's still the same selection of murderous bow types—hello, predator arrows—and all kinds of swords and spears, but you can now craft arrows and add traits and abilities. Plus, a blacksmith can add engravings to weaponry, giving it a specific benefit when you add it to your deadly arsenal.

And you'll need it. Ancient Greece is in flux. What's war good for? *Assassin's Creed* stories. This time around, it's the Peloponnesian War, a raging battle between Athens and Sparta. While you don't need to even choose a side, smaller story beats mean you are constantly controlling the power in Greece. Even the small island of Delos is controlled by a grim leader known as Podarkes. There's no barging straight into his house to stick a spear in his neck (thanks to a swathe of guards swarming round him), but take control of other parts of the island and his protection will fall. Burning chests of war supplies and taking down encampments removes his power, represented by a bar on the map screen, and destabilizes the island. It's a fascinating way of blending sidequests and main story as a key reason to take on forts and enemy fortifications.



ABOVE Everything is permitted. Except *that*! Shame on you.



BELOW You get to sail in Greek triremes (that's a boat with oars dontcha know).

CREED ALL ABOUT IT (CONT.)



ASSASSIN'S CREED IV BLACK FLAG
Assassins of the Caribbean! Edward Kenway sets sail as a pirate. Arrrrgh!

1715-1722



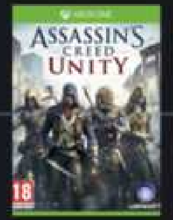
ASSASSIN'S CREED ROGUE
Set during the Seven Years War between the English and French.

1752-1776



ASSASSIN'S CREED III LIBERATION HD
It's New Orleans and the French and Indian war for the first playable female Assassin, Aveline.

1754-1783



ASSASSIN'S CREED UNITY
Arno uncovers the real power behind the French Revolution in 18th century Paris.

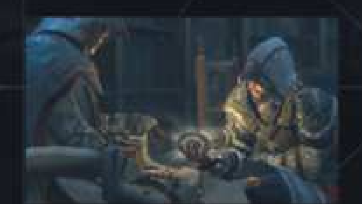
1776-1780



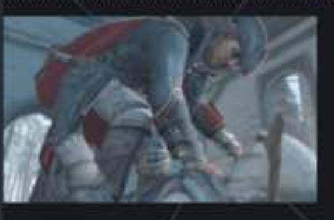


MEMORY LANE

Avoid that synch-ing feeling with the greatest Assassin's Creed moments in and out of the Animus



EZIO MEETS ALTAIR
ASSASSIN'S CREED REVELATIONS
When Ezio finally makes his way inside the library at Masyaf, he finds Altair's skeleton sitting holding an ancient artefact. We then play as the original Assassin, frail and elderly, as he takes his final 'rest' in the same chair. *sob*



HE'S A TEMPLAR!
ASSASSIN'S CREED 3
AC 3 isn't fondly remembered, but starts with a satisfying twist. You start off as Haytham Kenway, using eagle vision, clambering around a theater, and getting stabby with your hidden blade. It's only a few hours in that you discover you've been a nefarious Templar *the whole time*.



GOODBYE DESMOND
ASSASSIN'S CREED 3
He's a bit divisive, our Des. Yet regardless of your thoughts on the much-maligned modern day element, you'd have to be made of granite not to have a bit of a moment when Desmond Miles sacrifices himself to save mankind. No? Oh, you monster.

"The ocean of Odyssey's Greece is just waiting for you to explore"

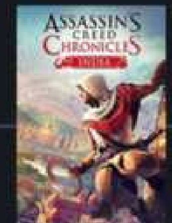
ABOVE Acropolis now: We love the smell of olives in the morning.

It's this shifting power that unlocks the spectacularly cinematic Conquest Battles. Once Podarkes' power is at his lowest, a general sends Kassandra into a glorious 150 vs 150 battle on a beach at sunset. The sand is a gory, chaotic swarm of swords and shields. A gauge at the top of the screen shows who's winning, and you just need to keep it on the right side of history by slaughtering enemy soldiers and the generals who try to get in your way. It's a thrilling way to practise your godlike abilities as Kassandra kicks her way across the sands. Finally a 'hero' of the opposing force appears, forcing you to beat him in tense combat to seal the deal of the battle. Screaming "this is Sparta" at the top of your voice as you finally shuffle him off this mortal coil is, of course, optional.

Odyssey then is a game of moments. Victoriously winning a grand battle. Avoiding becoming a lunch for sharks. Donning a new helmet instead of a hood. Even quest markers now showing a general area and letting you find missions for yourself means the Creed no longer holds your hand on your way through history. There is no right or wrong way to play here, you aren't an Assassin fulfilling a sacred duty in the endless war against the Templars. It's finally up to you, and the potential that this offers couldn't be more exciting. Everything is, finally, permitted. ■



ASSASSIN'S CREED III
In the colonies, Connor fights Templars during the War of Independence.
1765-1777



ASSASSIN'S CREED CHRONICLES: INDIA
Arbaaz Mir runs sideways through 19th century India.
1841



ASSASSIN'S CREED SYNDICATE
Twins Jacob and Evie Frye wrest Victorian London back from Templar control.
1868-1888



ASSASSIN'S CREED CHRONICLES RUSSIA
Chronicles' finale is set against the backdrop of the Russian Revolution.
1918

THE HISTORY OF ASSASSIN'S CREED

PLUG INTO THE ANIMUS FOR A STEALTHY TRIP BACK IN TIME

A device that lets you relive the memories of your ancestors? Ancient artefacts crafted by a mankind predating alien race known as Those Who Came Before? An eternal battle between age old fraternities? That the first in the free-running stealth franchise managed to deliver all of these concepts without falling on its hooded face is quite the feat. Not only that, it went on to spawn another ten awesome games in its main series alone. Here we take a trip back through those key moments in both actual history and Xbox gaming history, from Altair's caped Crusade capers via Ezio's Italian dalliances, right up to Bayek walking like an Egyptian in last year's massive *Origins*.



ASSASSIN'S CREED

DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL / **RELEASE** 2007

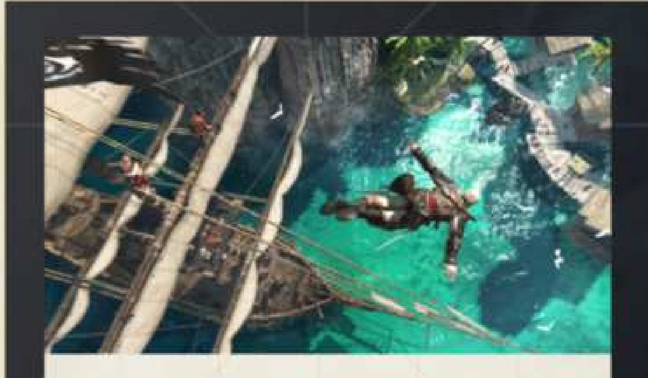
Assassin's Creed introduces Desmond Miles in the present day, kidnapped by the modern face of the Templar order, and forced to relive the memories of his 12th century ancestor, Altair Ibn-La'Ahad, via the Animus. Cleverly, despite the fact that Altair is already an Assassin, he's been stripped of his title, meaning you're handed the hidden blade and forced to relearn the ways of the Brotherhood. The skylines of Acre, Damascus, and Jerusalem are the atmospheric birthplace of so many Creed staples. Leaps of faith. Synchronizing. Hay. It all started here.

ASSASSIN'S CREED II

DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL / **RELEASE** 2009

With the now iconic Jesper Kyd soundtrack, this Italian masterpiece is where it all went so right for the series. 15th century hooded lothario Ezio is a charmer, but the sprawling sun-kissed cities of Florence, Tuscany and Venice are the true stars. The streets and rooftops are packed with potential. Sidequests! Chests! Codex pages! Leonardo da Vinci… A juicy revenge quest catapults the narrative forward, but it's the individual moments that matter most. The juicy addition of the second hidden blade, the atmospheric hidden tombs. Add in the small matter of a town, Monteriggioni, to upgrade,and *AC 2* says *requiscat en pace* to the slight repetition of the original.





ASSASSIN'S CREED IV: BLACK FLAG

DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL / **RELEASE** 2013

Black Flag lives and breathes the Golden Age of Piracy on the azure Caribbean seas. Edward Kenway (yep, another Desmond ancestor) and his ship the Jackdaw are equal stars here. While there's the bright cities of Kingston and Nassau to explore, it's Davy Jones' locker where *Black Flag* truly shines. Tantalizing shipwrecks await in the deep. Flotillas of ships prowl the waves. There's nothing like turning enemy vessels to Swiss cheese with your cannon before swinging aboard to take down the crew and claim their loot for your own.

ASSASSIN'S CREED UNITY

DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL / **RELEASE** 2014

Things get confusingly meta as you play as a games console player being hacked by modern day Assassins, but thankfully *Unity* still manages to be an atmospheric adventure. French Revolution Paris, with bustling streets of jugglers and caverns of bones, is like exploring a beautiful painting, and it's the first in the series to revamp assassination missions. Arno's kill list means *Hitman* style mini-sandboxes full of murderous choice and distraction options. A heartfelt story, the bold addition of co-op, a free-run up *and down* option, and the ability to jump into rifts that whisk you to different time periods make for a fascinating, if flawed game.





ASSASSIN'S CREED ROGUE

DEVELOPER UBISOFT SOFIA / **RELEASE DATE** 2014

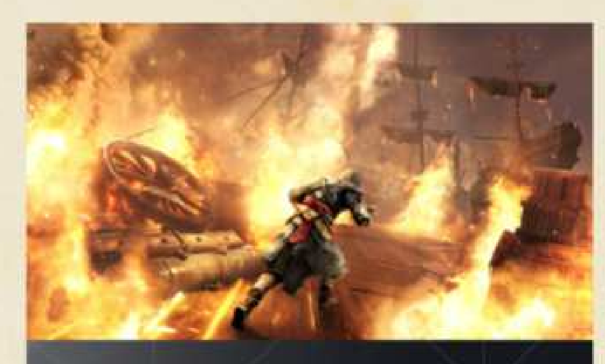
Shades of gray in this tale of Assassin turned Templar Shay, betrayed and sailing the 18th century North Atlantic. His Irish accent might be Lucky Charms levels of bad, but Shay's adventures are essentially a very chilly *Black Flag*. The icy seas are teeming with ships to loot, wildlife to hunt, and a dangerous number of puzzles and collectibles, despite a shorter campaign. If you thought you'd got away from those Assassins, think again. Just like in *AC*'s multiplayer, whispers indicate you're being hunted and you'll need to spot your pursuers before their hidden blades find you.

ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD

DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL / **RELEASE** 2010

A mere year after *ACII*, *Brotherhood* stealthily avoids substandard sequel territory. As Desmond and co hunt an Apple of Eden in the modern day, Ezio travels to Rome. Keeping the action in one city never feels restrictive as there are plenty of new toys to play with. Combat upgrades add satisfyingly gory chained counter kills, you get a helpful crew of stab-on-demand Assassins, and the series gets its first fast travel system and a tense multiplayer mode. Free areas from nefarious Borgia control and Rome is a fixer-upper, as you pay to repair shops and utilities. It all adds up to a sandbox loop as pleasurable as hunting down Cesare Borgia.





ASSASSIN'S CREED: REVELATIONS

DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL / **RELEASE** 2011

Things in the modern day take a significant turn for the weirder. Poor Desmond is stuck in the Animus, his mind trapped on a rocky island, still reliving Ezio's life. Ezio's grizzlier and well into his 40s, but that doesn't make his trip to Constantinople any less thrilling. The jagged skyline of the Byzantine city delivers a hook blade to hurtle across ziplines, and adds bomb crafting to Ezio's CV. There's even time for our favorite charming murderer to meet the love of his life. A fitting end to the trilogy.

ASSASSIN'S CREED III

DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL / **RELEASE** 2012

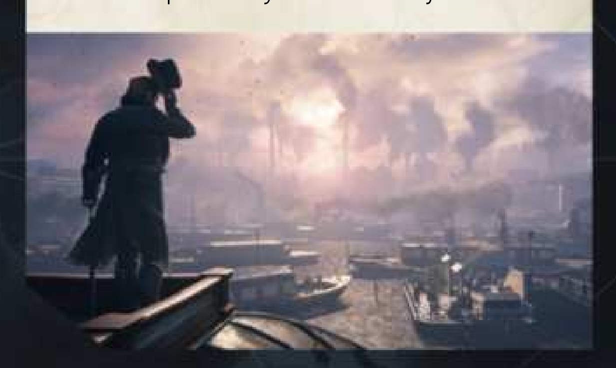
Finally adding that pesky *III* to the title, the 18th century American Revolution journey of Ratonhnhaké:ton—or Connor Kenway—was a massive turning point for the franchise. *ACIII* delivers exhilarating free running as Connor skips nimbly from branch to branch in the snowy Frontier between Boston and New York. Connor's skills far outweigh his Renaissance predecessor. Crafting and hunting, naval combat, an economy system, and gloriously juicy dual-wield fisticuffs in a sprawling open world pave the way for future Creeds. Oh, and don't forget poor old Desmond back in the present day. His last hurrah unleashes an evil alien on the internet, *who is still there*.



ASSASSIN'S CREED SYNDICATE

DEVELOPER UBISOFT QUEBEC / **RELEASE** 2015

This trip to a joyously realized Victorian London—complete with a bustling Thames for Assassin *Frogger*—revitalizes the joy of traversing a *Creed* sandbox. A rope launcher lets you hurtle up to rooftops Spidey-style. British humor keeps the narrative going, but it's beautiful chaos. Gang chases, train robberies, workhouses to liberate, police who don't like it when you steal carriages, local celebrities like Charleses Dickens and Darwin, and *the ability to crouch* make *Syndicate* a triumphant follow-up to *Unity*'s uncertainty.





ASSASSIN'S CREED ORIGINS

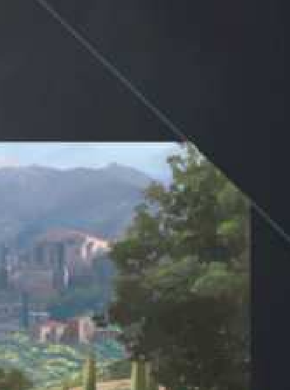
DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL / **RELEASE** 2017

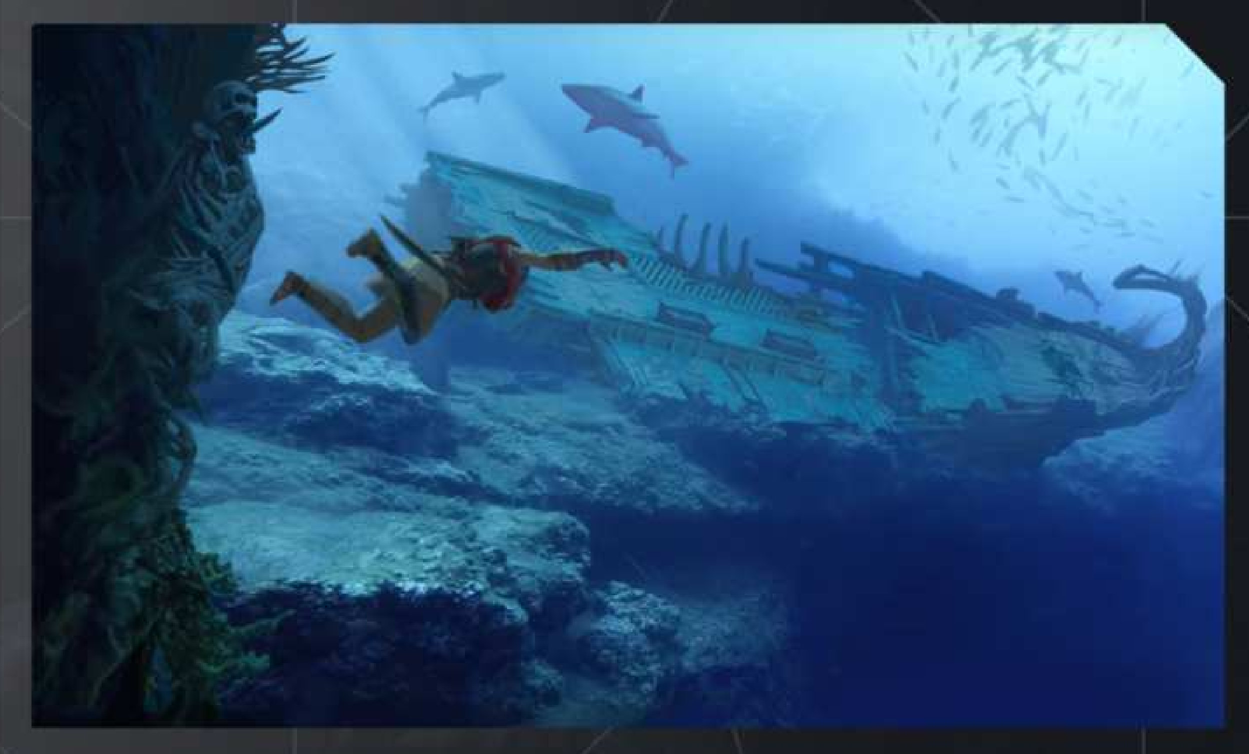
What's that saying? Tenth time's a charm? Celebrating a decade of stabby freerunning, *Origins'* trip to Ancient Egypt pushes the reset button on everything we knew about the Creed. Finally adding a new modern day protagonist, Layla Hassan, with her own fresh take on the Animus, *Origins* effortlessly pulls ten years of *AC* narrative into line *and* delivers the story of the birth of the Brotherhood. Medjay Bayek's Egypt is far more than just sand, pyramids, and camels. Although they're there too, this is a gloriously realized slice of living history matched with RPG-style quests, the binning of the *AC* mini map, and a new take on combat with light and heavy attacks and a serious difficulty spike. The journey of Bayek and his equally deadly wife Aya breathes new life into the series with its sprawling scope and seemingly infinite inventive to-do list. Just mind the snakes. Aaand the hippos.

Ever wondered why there's no buttons or health bar in the modern day sections? You're not in the Animus…

Q&A

WE SPEAK TO JONATHAN DUMONT, CREATIVE DIRECTOR ON ASSASSIN'S CREED ODYSSEY, ABOUT PLAYER CHOICES, ROMANCE, AND STAYING TRUE TO HISTORY





What made you decide to go with the branching choices for *Odyssey*?
We felt that giving our players a new way to explore history and a new way to really connect with the main character's action was taking the next step into transforming the *Assassin's Creed* franchise into a full RPG. We wanted your choices to give you not necessarily a different outcome like in the main storyline, but you always think about what you're going to say and embrace different roles so we all come into a game having different expectations. The game has a base personality and an expressive personality—it gives you the fantasy of being a mercenary from Sparta, and then allows you to play that as you are, so if you want to be a mercenary doing things for money or if you want to be more compassionate like a hero you can do both. It allows you to really interject yourself into the story and make it your own *Odyssey*.

It's quite a change development wise—what challenges has changing that structure brought to development?
First of all, we had to create a tool to allow us to do this, so we created our own dialogue tool that enabled us to go from around three to four hours of pure cinematic where you don't have an input, to having over 30 hours of dynamic dialogue with player choices. So it's something where we can get an automatic generation based on the lines that we have, and then our cinematic team can retouch everything and really create scenes that are interesting.

It was also a big change from a writing point of view and a quest point of view—allowing you to have input in the story, the way we write, the staff writing, the number of writers—that all went up. We wanted to make sure we have an iteration process where it's my voice as a player that's heard, so early on in the process we wanted to have drafts that could be playable much earlier than we've done before so that we can change and make sure that all the choices are satisfying. It's quite a bit of a change from a writing perspective and how we want to reflect what the player's thinking is at that point, so like when you're writing a quest you need to be able to zoom out and see, well I've done these things, I've been offered these choices before, so I'm sort of building up towards something—I'm playing like a hero so I want that to be reflected in the next quest. It's really like looking a little bit more at the player's psychology and giving them total autonomy to what they're doing.

How do you balance player choices and being free to do things and still keeping the historical beats?
When we have historical events, moments in history that have been recorded, you



stay true to that so you don't change history—you change *your* story through history. So, for example, we have the plague of Athens—we try to make it as realistic and historically accurate as we can, at least based on what we've researched, and then we give you moments with the characters that are not recorded so you can develop their personalities. Those historical characters, based on what we've read, let's say Socrates—we knew he was quite a bit of a character, always asking questions, he didn't wear shoes, he was a little bit brash, and things like that—so we played with those characteristics to be able to have a deep-diving philosophy talk with him, but when he's in a historical moment we stay true to that historical moment.

"WE DON'T TRY TO PUNISH PLAYERS, PLAY YOUR STORY AND IT WILL ALL PAN OUT!"

What kind of choices do you imagine that players might make in the game? Can they be good or bad?

We try to say that there are no wrong choices. They're all choices that you make and they're all valid. They'll give you what you are looking for I guess, but I think most of the time people try to be nice. I hope [laughs]. It's okay to decide depending on the situations—we have multiple storylines, but we have a main storyline that has quite a bit of it inspired by a Greek tragedy, so we try to put you into situations where choices will be tough—not necessarily what the impact will be, but they're very emotional. When they make a choice after that in the world, we also give you options so you can lie, romance, or decide to attack people in the dialogue as well, so those will have immediate consequences. You sort of know where you want to guide things, and sometimes lying to somebody can be beneficial, sometimes it won't be—it's up to you to explore. We don't try to punish players, play your story, and it will all pan out in the end I'm sure [laughs]! But really each situation we try to make you make some decision, either short term, long term, or medium term decisions, or building up relationships with characters. It's not about being good or bad, it's more like, do what you feel you should do here, and you get different results from different players.

Do your choices lead you to 'good' and 'evil' paths like some traditional RPGs?

It's more: Here's a big storyline and a storyline about making personal choices, and those choices will have an impact down the road, or immediately. It's not about influencing a faction necessarily or having an effect on the main storyline, it is much more about your personal journey. We tried to look at it as what would happen in this Greek tragedy if the main character had decided to do *this* instead, so we were looking at it more from a classical storytelling point of view, rather than into a system point of view, to feel more natural. Or at least we think it feels natural.

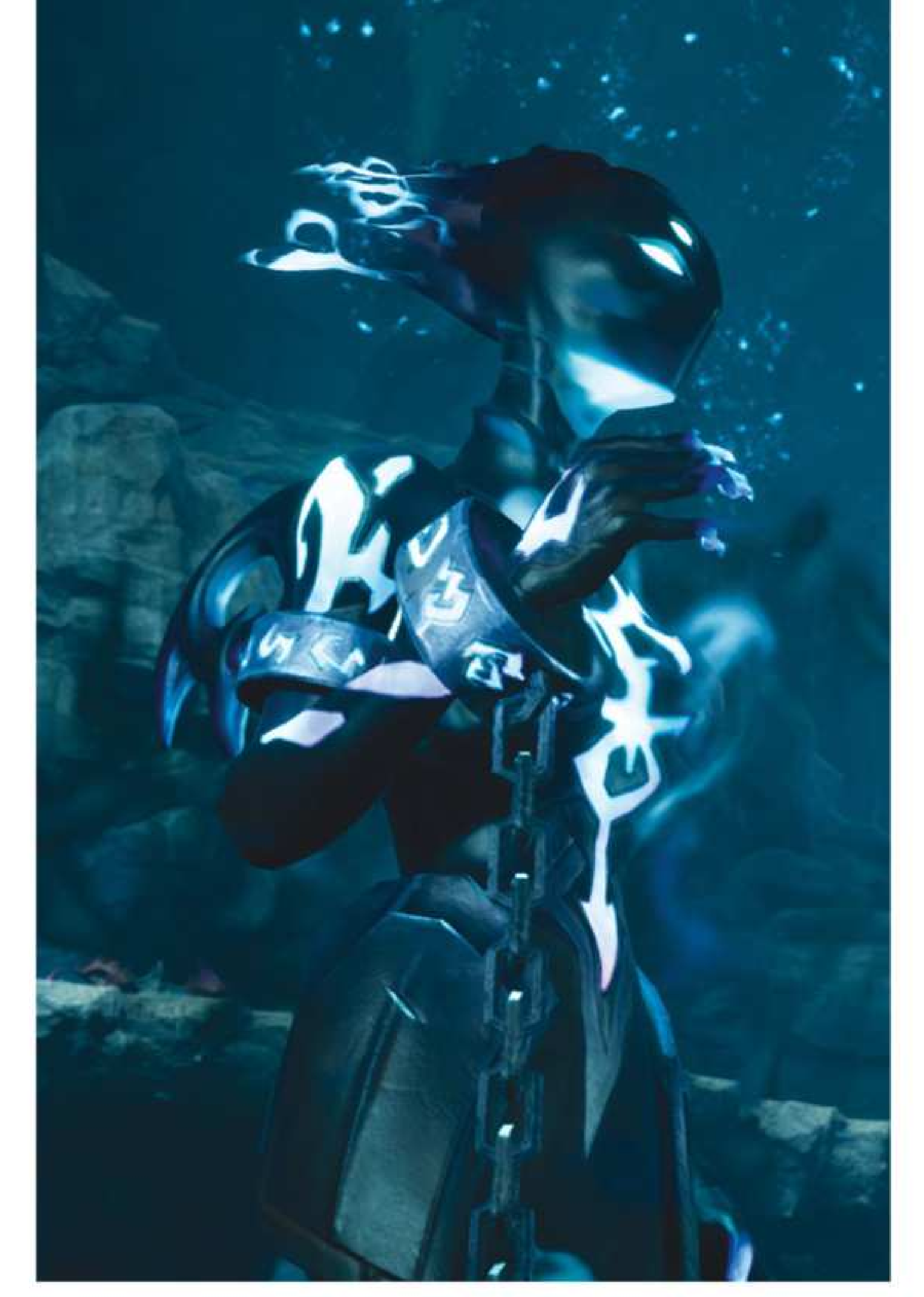
What kind of relationships can you build with characters?

You'll meet characters where you will build friendships, and also what you say to them will have an impact on how they interact with you. Maybe down the road these characters will interject themselves into other stories—those are more friendship-oriented. Then we have a handful of romantic possibilities in the game. We don't have a full romance story that goes from the start to the end, it's more like you go to an island and there's a romantic situation possible there, and then if you fail it or you're not interested in this one or whatever you can always meet someone else. But we try to keep it as a fun thing where you can actually roleplay it and have some fun.

Do you think the rest of the series will follow suit or is it just *Odyssey* that's going with this style?

We'll start with *Odyssey*, and then we'll see later! I think it's the next step in that progression from *Origins*. *Origins* did super-well at putting in progression and leveling up, gear, making it a large world with quests rather than big missions, so it's a continuation of that. So we'll see! I'm interested in that, but we'll see! ■

Assassin's Creed Odyssey will be released on October 5.









Darksiders creator Joe Mad also created the *Battle Chasers* game, adapted from his own comic series. It's available on Xbox One



Dark *In*siders Gunfire Games



OXM VISITED GUNFIRE GAMES' TEXAS STUDIO TO MEET THE FOLK BEHIND THE DARKSIDERS SERIES, AND FIND OUT WHAT FURY'S NEW ADVENTURE HAS IN STORE FOR US

CHRIS BURKE







LEFT AND ABOVE Concept art including Wrath, one of the Seven Deadly Sins that Fury is tracking down

BELOW LEFT Fury also wields a pair of flaming nunchuks.



Late June is bringing humidity and baking sunshine to the Lone Star State, and it's hotter than hell outside. But comfortably air-conditioned within Gunfire Games' Austin, Texas studio, **OXM** is battling hell's own creatures as Fury, the third of the Horsemen—actually a horsewoman, of course—in a lengthy hands-on session with Xbox One's first proper *Darksiders* game.

On the wall of Gunfire Games' studio hangs an impressive replica of War's gigantic sword from the first *Darksiders*, while a statuette of the Joe Mad-inspired Death from *Darksiders II* sits on the reception area's coffee table, next to a copy of **OXM** from last year featuring Fury on its cover. They are proud reminders of both the series' legacy and its developers' exciting present, following a phoenix-like rise from the ashes of the now defunct Vigil Games. That *Darksiders III* is being made at all is testament to both the developers' grit and the cult popularity of the franchise.

Vigil Games was formed in Austin in 2005 by David Adams and Joe Madureira, a comic book writer and artist who had worked on Marvel's *Uncanny X-Men* series, and whose style informed *Darksiders*' distinct design aesthetic. But after Vigil's parent company THQ went bankrupt in 2012, Adams plus John Pearl, now Gunfire's Design Director, took a handful of other erstwhile Vigil staff and formed their own studio in 2014. Initially the team developed games for VR headsets, including *Cronos* and *Herobound*, and remastered *Darksiders II*—as *The Deathinitive Edition*—for Xbox One. But they were not done with the *Darksiders* series. With THQ Nordic's backing, they could now return to the concept of *Darksiders III* that they had already been discussing before Vigil closed. And so Fury was born, or rather reborn.

The *Darksiders* games found a strong fanbase; they resonated with gamers both for their strong visual identity and in their ambitious formula of exploration, puzzles, challenging combat, and unique, apocalyptic world filled with angels, demons, and other denizens of the underworld. And as fans of the series ourselves, it was a no-brainer for **OXM** to accept an invite to spend quality hands-on time with the title before it launches this November, and meet Gunfire's creative leads, game director David Adams, and design director John Pearl…

After Vigil Games closed, it looked like *Darksiders III* would never get made… at what point did you realize you could actually make it happen?

David: At some point after we'd finished *Cronos*, which was the first big VR game that we did, we said we actually have enough people, and we'd just done the *Darksiders II: The Deathinitive Edition* port, and it just seemed like a good time to do the game. Plus everyone here was starting to get really excited again about making *Darksiders III*.

John: Another thing that sounded good was, the thing that we always wanted and that we never got, was a pre-production creative. For *Darksiders I*, we were just figuring it out; for *Darksiders II* we had this entire team from *Darksiders*, so 'let's do something with them'—we just kind of pushed forward and tried to get concepts and ideas; it just kind of happened while production was happening. So we were talking like, hey, we can actually get the time we want and really plan out the world. And that's been a huge boon to us, we were able to lay out the world at a really early stage and get an idea of the size and the requirements of the game, and look at concepts for the characters and really take our time and go into full production with a really good idea of what we were making.

You mentioned in your *Darksiders III* presentation today that the Four Horsemen characters follow RPG-type class roles…

David: We imagined the line-up [of the Horsemen] as Warrior, Mage, Thief, and Necromancer. And the problem we ran into, when we got to doing Fury, was, okay, she's going to be a Mage, but still a big part of the game is melee combat—the cool, visceral, doing awesome combos thing, so if we got

The Horsemen are actually a race called the Nephilim. Nephilim crop up in English goth band Fields Of The Nephilim. No relation

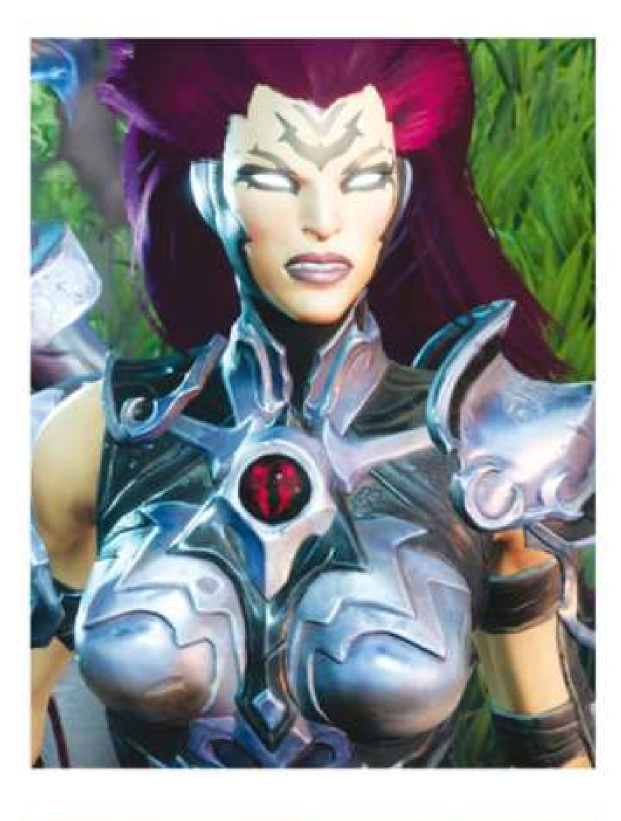
"I think you've just got to try stuff, and we didn't want to be stale"

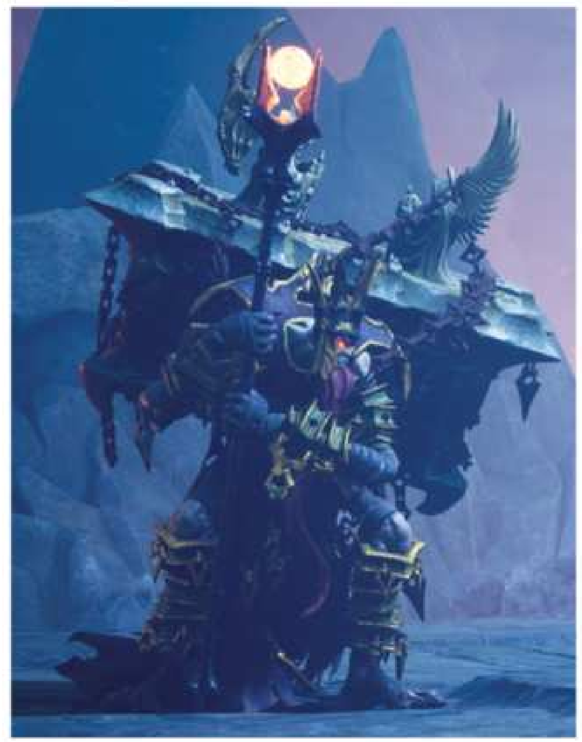
too Mage-y and spell-based or range-based, it would cease to be that kind of game. So we had to present her magical abilities through melee combat, and that really drove a lot of the direction. As far as the RPG aspect goes, I think we bounced around from project to project, the first one was super-RPG like, the second one was much more almost like *Diablo*, random loot, skill trees, the whole-nine, so this one landed somewhere in between.

Fury's hair is a really big part of her character and her power…
John: We joked early on that it was like we've got three main characters, we have Fury, we have her hair and we have the whip, and those all have to look cool when they are put together, so definitely each one had to have that level of minute detail.
David: Her hair doesn't really obey the laws of physics, every time we get concept art, her hair's like 'swooosh', really swirling up and doing great stuff, so we wanted to capture that in the game. It's not like her hair's lying down like a typical person with long hair, it's kind of got a mind of its own. So we spent a decent amount of time trying to do that, but not make it look weird like it's a plastic hood. It moves around and reacts.

It's a fantasy world but you seem to strive for a certain degree of realism.
John: Even with *Darksiders I* it was never like this is the real world, it's a twist on that. This is not your typical post-apocalypse—it's not human-caused, angels and demons have caused this apocalypse, so we wanted it to feel like it's not just a *Fallout* world. It's not nukes, it's these unknown powers, so we had giant spikes coming through buildings and chains linking buildings together like, hey this is a demon's playground now! It's the fantastical elements on top of the realism that we're trying to sell in the *Darksiders* world—this is not just a city, it's a *Darksiders* city.

Fury is hunting the Seven Deadly Sins, that have been unleashed on earth— how did you approach the character design for the Sins?
David: It was mostly trying to capture what the sin represented. We didn't want anything







scary or grotesque, it was more, hey what's a comic book interpretation of the Seven Deadly Sins? Wrath's obviously in a giant suit of armor, you probably at some point [in the playthrough] could have seen Sloth across a passageway, and he's a giant, fat insect-like thing on a throne. We tried to capture their particular weakness, their sin, as much as possible.

You've reworked the mechanic of the hub-world with dungeons leading off it, this seems to be kind of one big dungeon?
John: Before, it was very hub-based, but there's something very interesting about a world wrapping back on itself, it feels more natural and less contrived and it gives you a perspective on the world. In *Darksiders I* you go off to this world, and then you come back and you don't have any relative perspective on, where *is* that church? It's the typical Metroidvania game design, where you're using tools to traverse areas you've been through before in a new way. There's something really cool about making it one big dungeon, about the whole path-through feeling like this seamless environment where one area transitions into the next.

How much does making a sequel allow you to be able to take on board fan requests and/or problems people found with the first games?
David: You've definitely got to be true to the franchise, right? There's got to be exploration, cool melee combat, puzzles, and some sort of progression. That's *Darksiders* in a nutshell. And I think that we're pretty risky in that we do change it up quite a bit. When we were working on *Darksiders II*, even internally, the development team, there were guys that were like, "Man, random loot? Skill trees? I just want an action game, why are you putting all this weird RPG stuff in?" There were a lot of fans who were like, what did you do? We liked *Darksiders I* way better, then you got a lot of fans who were like, "*Darksiders II* is way better than *Darksiders*." So at the end of the day it just increased the pool of fans because we brought more people in. I think you've just got to try stuff, and we didn't want to be stale. Let's keep it interesting and make sure every game is different.

You were able to work with Unreal 4 this time, what kind of a difference did that make to what you could do with the game?
David: *Darksiders I* and *II* were on our proprietary engine at Vigil, so we were super-excited to work on Unreal 4. Not dissing the engine which I made a lot of myself, but it's hard to maintain a complex engine. We did okay with what we had, but





ABOVE Fury's whip is magical, so she doesn't have to worry about tripping herself up while she runs around in those impractical heels.

RIGHT Death left his scythe just lying around the Gunfire office, in a clear breach of health and safety.



War's horse is Ruin, Death's horse is Despair. We haven't yet seen Fury's horse, but it's rumored to be called Torment. Or possibly Dobbin

"A lot of stuff is way easier now than it was when we did Darksiders I and II"



LEFT Fury's hair changes to reflect the power she's currently wielding, eg: Fire.

BELOW Concept art of one of *Darksiders III*'s dungeons.



with this one we were like we've got Unreal 4, we've got all the cool tools, and that was super-exciting. Plus just being able to do all the next-gen stuff. There's a lot of stuff that's way easier now than it was when we did *Darksiders I* and *II*, for sure.

The combat in *Darksiders III* seems quite challenging this time.

David: This gets back to one of the major changes; there are no more gated fights. With *Darksiders I* and *II* it was very much, you come into a room, a barrier pops up over the door, old-school *God Of War* style, right? Then you fight six waves of guys, and it's like duh-duhhh! You beat that combat, and you go to the next one. *Devil May Cry* was the same way, and when we worked on *Darksiders I* that's just the way you did it, every game was that way. A lot of games have come out since then, which I find refreshing, where you don't need to do that. You can organically present players with enemies. But what happens when you do that is you have to up the challenge a little because when you're not stuck in a room you can just run past the enemies, and so it's much more important to create situationally difficult things. Our game organically has blockers. You might run into a puzzle, or a door you can't open, so that adds another layer of strategy, and you can't just run through the game because you're going to run into a puzzle you have to solve and that's going to slow you down— some of those guys you ran past are going to come in and kick you. But I think as to specifically the difficulty, it's a side-effect of the fact that you're not fighting 20 guys any more, so you have to consider that the difficulty that was previously five waves of five, like 25 enemies, is now encapsulated in one or two enemies.



We like the way that those enemies are presented as just getting on with stuff, not waiting around for you.

John: Some of them are in the world to just be there, and you're going to attack them, and then they'll get mad at you for attacking them. The skeletons, for example, are quite passive if you run past them, but people naturally are just like, "I need to hit that! It's a bad guy, I'm going to punch them!" Particularly the bomb bugs— you're going to kill the bomb bug, and he does no harm to you! We wanted to create more of a living breathing world. Because it's not a gated fight, we can place enemies in the world doing things, it makes it feel like there's a reason for them, they're not just there to punch you in the face! It's a fun thing, because then you can take the combat a little bit more at your own pace. It gives you a lot more options in combat in how you engage them, and it offers up a lot of variety from encounter to encounter. ■

Darksiders III is coming to Xbox One on November 27.



DARKSIDERS JANUARY 2010
Comic artist Joe Mad co-created this hack'n'slash classic featuring Horseman of the Apocalypse, War. The gameplay is a combination of puzzling and battling waves of demons, with some creative level design and imaginative bosses.

DARKSIDERS II AUGUST 2012
There's more verticality to Death's adventure, with some *Prince Of Persia* style climbing sitting well alongside *Diablo*-ish dungeon-crawling, Metroidvania gameplay and hack 'n' scythe combat.

CRONOS APRIL 2016
Adams and his newly formed Gunfire team tackled the emerging technology of the Oculus VR headset, creating PC titles such as *Cronos*, an action adventure RPG that has you exploring a mysterious and vibrant fantasy world.

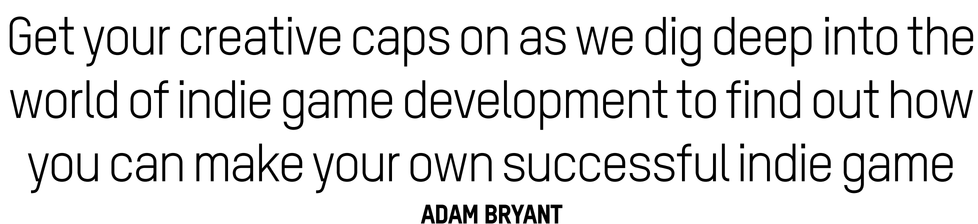




OXM INVESTIGATES

UNLEASH YOUR INNER INDIE





Get your creative caps on as we dig deep into the world of indie game development to find out how you can make your own successful indie game

ADAM BRYANT

Okay, so you've got a killer idea for a game, but have no idea where to start. Or maybe you have a vague idea, but the sheer volume of things to consider makes going beyond your initial idea seem overwhelming and stops you from getting past the first steps in creating something amazing.

Well, we don't want that, do we? So we decided to investigate the development of indie games to compile some practical advice from the people who know it best. We spoke to a bunch of developers who were more than happy to offer you their guidance. One thing that resounded above all else is that there's never been a better time to jump into the world of game development and realize your ambitions. Be warned: Making a game isn't for everyone, and it takes a lot of hard work, but if you're up for the challenge there will be nothing stopping you from beginning your indie game journey.









We know you're itching to get going, but before you do there are a couple of things to acknowledge. "You need to know just how much you don't know," explains *Cuphead* art director Chad Moldenhauer. "You don't know how much things are really going to cost, you don't know how long things are really going to take to develop. You don't really know how interrelated art, programming, and design are, and how time and money limitations on one will cause compromise on the other two. Once you know that you *don't know* these things, you'll realize that your scope and time scale plans are wrong, and you'll be more realistic with what you can do."

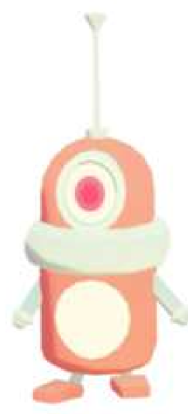
You also need to be doing it for the right reasons. If you're thinking of doing it for the money, you're going to be hugely disappointed. "Making indie games isn't lucrative for everyone, and it's quite a bit more stressful than many other occupations," says *Ooblets* developer Ben Wasser. "An office job is a typically easier, safer, and higher-paying career path. I'd still personally prefer to make indie games, but people shouldn't be under false impressions when they jump in."



Getting started

With that clearly in mind, the next thing you need to do is take your idea and decide on





ABOVE Making *Ooblets* was more hard work than a typical office job, its developer says.

RIGHT *Cuphead* represents game creation at its most painstaking.

“Get your game as close as possible to what you want the final game to feel like before making it pretty”

which game engine you’ll use. There are plenty to choose from, such as Gamemaker Studio 2, Unreal, or Unity to name but a few. Each allow you to do different things, and all have free versions, so you can play around with them and see which one best suits the game you’re trying to make. Unity is the most popular among indie devs, as it works well with both 2D and 3D games. However, it does require you to learn coding. But thankfully there’s a solution for that, too. “There are so many amazing people taking the time to teach others for free,” says *The Last Night* developer Tim Soret. “Watch the GDC talks, YouTube videos, read 80.lv, Gamasutra articles. You will learn a ton, even if you don’t get it 100% for a long time.” Following tutorials is a great way to ease your way in, and applies to any other discipline within game development.

About time

Once you have your engine the real fun begins. “The best way to get started is to just start making your first simple game,” says Moldenhauer. “If you’re a programmer, start building a core prototype for the gameplay. If you’re an artist, start creating usable assets for the game. If you’re a designer, start doing level layouts and specific gameplay concepts. If you’re a writer, start writing the script. Once you start, you’ll see where your gaps in knowledge are, and then you can start trying to fill them in.” The key is to just start filling your game with something, anything.

“There are a ton of incredible artists you can find on Twitter, Tumblr, ArtStation, and Dribbble that you can hire freelance or full-time,” says Wasser. “There’s also a lot of stuff on the Unity Asset Store, which is good for testing out ideas.” But if you’re feeling extra confident you may want to do this yourself. “If art isn’t your forte, you can look at hiring your own artist,” says Chucklefish artist Lu Nascimento. “But if you’re interested in making pixel art assets yourself there’s loads of tutorials in forums, medium articles, YouTube, and even Twitter you can check out.” This is perfect if you’re unable to hire anyone to help, which will be most people when first starting out.

Be careful not to get ahead of yourself.



“Avoid developing high quality art assets before the core of the game feels right,” says Moldenhauer. “Get your game playing as close as possible to what you want the final game to feel like before making it pretty. If you’re putting a lot of work into art while the game is still in flux, you’re going to end up throwing out a lot of expensive work when the core changes. Or even worse, you’ll live with sub-standard gameplay because you don’t want to waste the art that was created for it.”

“Besides the technical development skills, there are soft skills—planning, teamwork, and so on,” says Chucklefish programmer Tom



Coxon. "Game jams are a great way to practise these, particularly if they are team-based, or impose thematic or time-related constraints."

Whatever you decide to make, finish it. It sounds obvious, but it's no secret that the majority of people who start making games don't actually finish them. The chances are the first game that you create won't be a good one, but the point is to learn how to finish a project and move on. You'll learn much about game development by making more games.

To help yourself, set your own deadlines and try to achieve something every day, no matter how small. It's easy to get caught up in the development of your game, but time management is important, and when done well it can improve productivity and motivation. "We use task management apps like Trello and Notion, to divide workload into manageable chunks, and keep visibility of each other's tasks between team members," says Chucklefish marketing strategist Katy Ellis. "It's really useful to have a very visual to-do list, which you can link working assets and documents to, and super satisfying to drag that task into the Complete section at the end of the day."

People always talk about the things you should do, but there are plenty of things you *shouldn't* do. "Ignoring the business side of game development is a common mistake," says Chucklefish producer Rosie Ball. "It may seem like a hassle when all you want to do is think about your amazing game idea, but having a few important processes in place such as a business plan, contracts between team members and documented roles and responsibilities within the team can help avoid major headaches further down the line, especially if the game becomes a success."

"Don't follow trends, and avoid crowded genres," says Soret. "There are dozens of genres that are nearly abandoned today, and dozens of audiences starving for more content. Look at the diversity of games [in the past], you will see many of these niches to fill. Choose one, and take it to new heights with modern physics, visuals, and storytelling."

"Avoid being quiet," says Wasser. "Share your work, talk to your audience, be open. Try not to bite off more than you can chew." Get involved with as many indie game communities as you possibly can. Many people are bumping into the same problems as you, and gaining their insight is invaluable. It's also a chance for you to help others by sharing your knowledge, too.







ABOVE *The Last Night* developer Tim Soret recommends swotting up with videos and talks.

Challenge checklist

As mentioned before, this will not be smooth sailing, and all the way through development you'll come across different challenges.

> "The biggest challenge is dealing with the massive workload and seeing it through to the end"

"The biggest challenge is dealing with the massive workload and seeing it through to the end," says Moldenhauer. "Once you get over the initial hump, it's exhilarating building out your game, being creative and solving problems as you go. That excitement and pride of creation can push you for a long time, but game development is so much longer than that. When you're squashing your thousandth bug on a sub-menu system that only a fraction of your possibly non-existent audience may ever see, it can be really difficult to press on."

"I think most developers struggle to get noticed among the mass of games being produced," says Soret. "You have to find an original angle, to offer something different. The other very tough part is that to make a game, you don't *just* make a game. You start a company, you create a team, *then* you make a game. These three tasks are massive and interdependent. You have to get your hands dirty in every aspect of production, and you have to get good at it. It's a lot to take on your shoulders. It's tiring and overwhelming, but it's also exciting in the sense that you can never be bored, there is always something new and interesting to work on."

This is something you can use to your advantage to gain visibility. "Don't shy away from your development story," explains Chucklefish product manager Tom Katkus. "One of the best things about indie games is that players get to know who's making



their games. This is great for getting players interested in your project, but you can use that same accessibility to get a publisher to know who you are."

Gaining visibility

Of course, having a publisher is super handy, but if you're making yourself visible in all the right ways, you may not even need one. That being said, if you end up finding yourself with a publishing opportunity, being prepared will help you in the long run. "Never give up your IP, and make sure you have an exit door in the contract in case development goes wrong," says Soret. "Also, consider looking for investors to take a stake in your company, rather than just going for publishers. Publishers are interested in the project they signed, while investors focus on growing your studio and long-term sustainability. It's a different world, it's intimidating, but it might be worth it."

"With any business relationship, what's specifically in the contract is more important than anything anyone says," explains Wasser. "A lot of developers don't really value, understand, or want to be bothered with the specifics of contracts, since they're sort of antithetical to the creative process, but it can seriously bite them later. If it's an important agreement, get a lawyer to go over it. Also, everything is negotiable."

Once you've earned your development chops by finishing projects you may want to develop games for the Xbox One. The ID@Xbox program is a great way of doing this. Developers accepted into it will obtain two free development kits and access to the system's architecture, so you can support your game with things like achievements.





The indie game world is scary, but every indie developer is rooting for you. "One of the good things about the game industry right now is that outsiders with limited resources can play at the same table as the big entrenched players with millions/billions of dollars," says Wasser. "There's always going to be a disadvantage to indies, but it's still better than the situation in most industries."

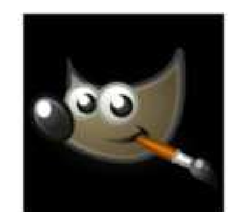
So what are you waiting for? Make a game!

INDIE GAME STARTER KIT

UNSURE WHICH SOFTWARE TO CHOOSE? HERE'S A LIST OF FREE PROGRAMS TO GET YOU ON YOUR WAY…



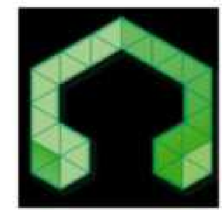
Unity
Engine
You can choose any other engine, but Unity is possibly the most popular engine for indie developers. It'll allow you to create both 2D and 3D games, and offers a wide range of tools and features.



Gimp
Art Program
This is a great piece of high quality software which does a similar job to Adobe Photoshop, and will allow you to painlessly create your own textures, backgrounds, or 2D sprites.



Blender
3D Modeller
If you're looking to create a 3D game or a game with 3D elements then this software, initially released 20 years ago, will allow you to not only make 3D models, but animate them too.



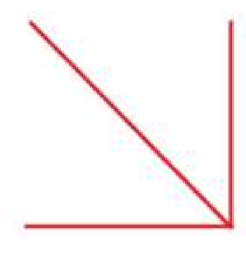
LMMS
Music Creator
This will allow you to create your own music and sound effects that you can import into Unity. You don't even need a keyboard, but you will need the appropriate hardware.



Wwise
Audio Program
This software, which is highly accessible, is utilized in many successful games, and is used to manipulate audio. For example you can simulate audio environments and mix tracks in real-time.


review
Your gaming month sorted with our definitive reviews
REVIEW
OVR-KD2

The team wasn't impressed when Dani named her first NMS planet 'Daniroolz'. The next big one will be named after her ego



How we score:

Can't make sense of our out-of-ten rating system? Then see below for your at-a-glance guide.

10 A gaming masterpiece
9 An essential slice of brilliance
8 Give it a whirl and you won't regret it
7 Some minor flaws but still good
6 Solid, but not setting any loins aflame
5 Average. Not good, but not terrible either
4 Honks just a bit
3 Look away, lest ye be tainted
2 Angry-makingly bad
1 Just... no...

ß Titles with this symbol are on Game Preview, so while they aren't finished, you can still find out if they're worth playing.



Irrespective of score, the Editor's Choice award is given to games with the quality, ambition or uniqueness to stand out from the crowd.

The stars have been calling us for a long time, and finally we can answer them and head into the great unknown thanks to No Man's Sky (p64) reaching Xbox One in its ultimate form. PC players may have had it for longer, but they've also been dealing with an inferior version for two years, so we're the real winners here. We've never felt so smug about travel delays into space before. Although while we've been busy pootling around the galaxy, aliens have slipped past us and invaded in Earthfall on p68. This co-op shooter claims to be like *Left 4 Dead*, but can it live up to such a highly rated predecessor? Read on to find out. Elsewhere we've been feeding the masses in Overcooked 2 (p70). Well, at least we've been trying to as things rarely go to plan in this frantic co-op cooking game. We may have burned down a few kitchens and ignored a few orders, but we're totally blaming art editor Warren for those incidents—it's his fault for not passing us those sliced onions fast enough. And no, trying to do so from a hot air balloon is not a good enough excuse. Finally, we tried to mend our broken friendships by playing a few rounds of Vermintide 2 together on p78, though we're not sure trying to fight off a plague of rat-like skaven was the best bonding experience. Maybe we just need better friends.

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‘Dead’ planets are still worth visiting, as they’re often rich with resources for mining



PUBLISHER 505 GAMES / **DEVELOPER** HELLO GAMES / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** OUT NOW / **COST** $59.99

No Man’s Sky

SPACE TRAVEL HAS NEVER LOOKED THIS PRETTY **DANIELLA LUCAS**

Why are any of us here? That’s the big philosophical question this space exploration game tries to pose as you hop between planets and star systems in search of answers. It’s not really something anyone can answer, but between the interstellar views of distant planets rising in the horizon and the planets filled with bizarre animals to befriend, we’re just happy to be along for the ride.

There is a story to give your expedition some direction—you’re a lost traveler who doesn’t know why they’re in the spot they are, but you start receiving strange transmissions that push you further into the depths of the galaxy. You’ll fix your ship and learn to warp between star systems, as well as meet several alien races and anomalies as you explore. There are missions to complete, ruins to find, and space battles to take part in as you jump from planet to planet. There are also several modes including your basic survival mode, which sees you farming for resources to charge your gear and gather fuel for your journey with a few difficulty levels, and a creative mode which does away with needing materials to charge things or craft, so you’re free to hop around at your leisure. However, only the survival mode includes the main story, and it’s what you’ll want to pick for the intended experience of being lost in space.

ABOVE Some planets are a lot more lonely than others, featuring no wildlife at all.

LEFT You can get your own freighter and fleet of ships to send out on missions but it’s a lot of work.

Your travels will mostly involve floating in space between planets and eventually jumping between solar systems. There are all sorts of fun distractions along the way thanks to *No Man’s Sky*’s random generation. Every planet and system is different. From dead moons to fungal forests and lush blue grasslands, there’s a huge variety of areas to discover, often rich with metals, plants, and oddly proportioned creatures. We’ve stumbled across dinosaurs that look like they’re on steroids, limply floating around on tiny butterfly wings, giant wolves, and, uh, a planet where every single creature looked worryingly phallic. There’s a constant sense of wonder and anticipation every time you touch down on a planet’s surface, unsure of what you’ll find, and it’s this that keeps us coming back.

Star treks

However, *No Man’s Sky* doesn’t exactly like to hold your hand. A lot of the game’s guides are tucked away in menus, and often you’ll only learn through experimentation and failure, such as what each alien race wants to hear, and why you shouldn’t mess with whispering eggs. The first planet is purposefully harsh to teach you how to survive, but our start was particularly bad. The planet we were on had toxic rain and all the materials we needed to recharge our hazard protection were quite rare. Admittedly

we died once before devising a strategy to reach a sodium cluster fast enough to protect ourselves. When we later booted up another game to see how random it was, we had better luck finding resources and even found some valuable vortex cubes to sell for an early influx of cash. It felt a little unfair, but the game is randomly generated, so every adventure will play out differently depending on what you find.

It's not all cute gremlins and tentacle trees either, sometimes the universe just wants to see you suffer. Animals can be aggressive and floating robot sentinels roam most planets waiting to see you do something wrong so they have an excuse to attack you. Sometimes you'll find alien outposts or ruins with some new friends to trade with, but occasionally you'll find them abandoned and overrun with sentient, pulsating flesh. Lovely. Space itself is just as risky—maybe you'll find a space station to do a spot of trading, or perhaps you'll be attacked by pirates after the contents of your cargo hold. That element of danger is compulsive, though.

Metropolis

Crafting is a huge part of *No Man's Sky*'s progression—over time you'll want to build add-ons for your ships, multi-tool and exosuit to tackle more dangerous environments. Some tools are used to refine elements to turn them into materials for more useful gear. If you find a planet full of resources or just views you really like you can even set up your own base by plopping down a computer and a shelter. You may start with simple shacks, but you'll eventually be able to build research stations for farming and mining to help you rake in more cash. Crafting is quite a slow and complicated process, as there are so many different elements to consider, and components to build first.

As well as space stations, occasionally you'll find fleets of random ships and freighters making their own journeys. For a fee you can buy one to turn it into your own mobile base. We acquired ours by answering a distress signal of a freighter under attack—after dispatching a handful of enemy ships and docking inside, the captain was all too willing to hand over his responsibilities without the price tag. It pays to be a good samaritan, although running your own fleet comes with a lot of responsibility. It'll require a lot of building up, which means going out and hunting for even more materials as well as fuel, and you'll also need to defend it from further attacks. It's worth it though, as you can slowly add more ships to

short cut

WHAT IS IT?
A space exploration game that sees you traveling to the center of the universe.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
A far more in-depth and sophisticated *Minecraft* that leans more towards discovery than crafting.

WHO'S IT FOR?
People who love sightseeing in games and taking the scenic route.



LEFT Space is also full of stations to explore and aliens to meet. You're not alone.

You won't be able to understand any of the aliens at first, but you'll learn their languages over time



LEFT All of the animals are randomly generated, like this giant dog-thing we found.

FAR LEFT Space is just as beautiful as the planets themselves.



your fleet and get them to do tasks for you, as well as have access to an expanded inventory.

You've probably heard about the drama surrounding *No Man's Sky*'s lack of multiplayer on other consoles over the last two years, but since we get the ultimate version on Xbox One there are no such worries, it's absurdly easy to hop into a game with friends. You can party up with three others and work together on your goals, and you can actually have up to 16 people in a single instance, though those not in your party will appear as orbs when you encounter them.

Minority report

Since everything is so randomized, luck can play a big part in your enjoyment of the game. If you get a run of dead or toxic planets with angry sentinels, you're not going to get the same initial joys as someone who's found paradise on their first try. There's not much fun in finding planet after planet with variations of nothing but angry crab-things, but when you find a dinosaur with a comically tiny head and get to rename it 'Mr Smallchops', everything is forgiven.

There's something intoxicating about the constant new discoveries when you travel between systems and planets. That element of the unknown is quite addictive—there might just be something even more amazing at your next stop and so there's an impulse to just keep going as you chase the potential of your next awesome find and the stupid name you'll be giving it. Time will mysteriously vanish as you play: You'll promise yourself 'I'll just finish this one next bit and end there', but suddenly it's five hours later and you're on another 'next little bit'.

There's a balance you'll need to strike—do you push yourself forward spending everything you have to reach the next goal prompt, or do you loiter somewhere to build up enough of a stash before continuing? That feeling of the grass potentially being greener at your next stop adds a sense of pressure to force yourself forward, but it's better if you try to ignore it. When you constantly hop around you miss out on all of the hidden secrets each planet holds and you end up feeling perpetually underprepared for your next jump. The real joy to *No Man's Sky* is in loitering to admire the spacescapes of the bizarre places you find—something you'll miss out if you're constantly racing ahead.

Unfortunately having to stockpile resources or finding a planet without the ones you need can slow down the game. It can be quite frustrating when all you want to do is explore but you're stuck hunting for fuel because you don't have enough to take off. It can also be disheartening when you see friends flying in expensive ships because they've been lucky with their resource spawns while you're stuck in an old beater of a craft. *No Man's Sky* can occasionally feel unfair, but that's also part of its charm—the highs wouldn't feel as amazing without some lows. As in real life, travel rarely goes smoothly, so while there may be a few bumps along the metaphorical space road, it's still worth it for the things you discover along the way. ■

STARTING TIPS

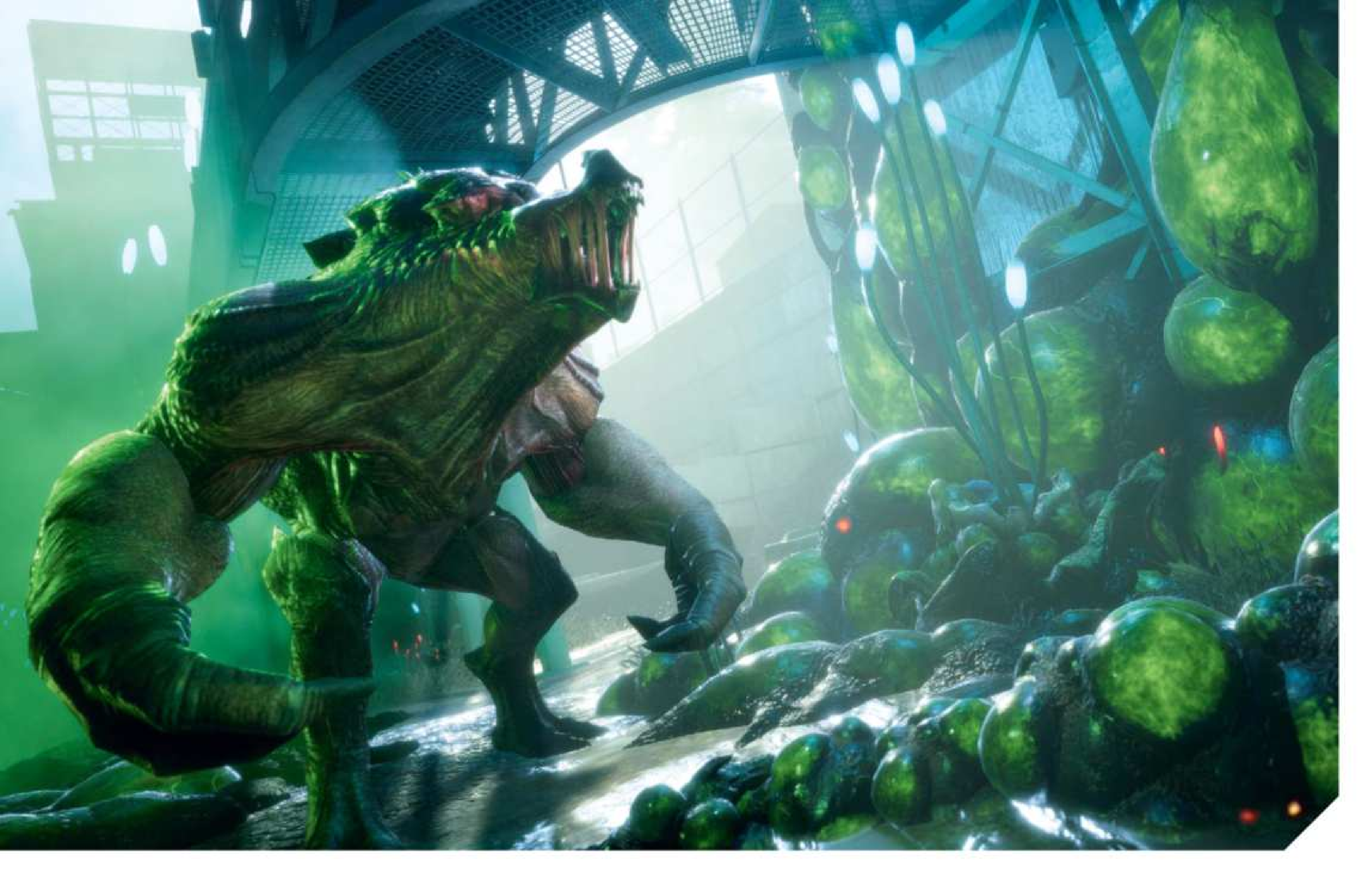
Setting off can be a little unclear so here are a few minor tips: If a sentinel comes near you, don't use your mining beam. It will interpret it as an aggressive act and attack you, so just stand still and it will go away. Hiding in caves will keep you safe from extreme weather storms. Find yellow sodium plants when you can—you use them to charge your hazard protection, which is critical when you first start out.

"The game can occasionally feel unfair, but that's also part of its charm"



OXM VERDICT
Wonderful for exploration, but has some issues with resource management.





PUBLISHER HOLOSPARK / **DEVELOPER** HOLOSPARK / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** OUT NOW / **COST** $29.99

Earthfall

DOES THIS FOUR-PLAYER CO-OP FPS LEAVE OTHERS FOR DEAD? **CHRIS BURKE**

The Earth has been invaded by aliens who have used EMP to knock out our power. In the redwood forests and snowy towns of the US Pacific Northwest, four survivors are trying to resist the invasion with the help of guns, medikits, and the bond of friendship. Yes, *Earthfall* is a four-player co-op FPS with a simple premise and familiar mechanic, that despite its low-budget origins does a decent job of providing fun combat and co-operative online shenanigans.

There are four characters: Which one you play as is picked randomly at the start of each match, but that choice is not significant. If you haven't got a squad, for single-play your group is auto-filled with AI bots. The game has you playing through two campaigns, each with ten 'scenarios' all with a slightly different, though geographically related, setting. Progress through these areas is pretty much linear, although since exploration is not your main aim, that doesn't detract too much. Objectives in each take the form of tasks like restoring power, repairing a comms array, or meeting up with an NPC.

Lust 4 life

The *Left 4 Dead* comparisons are unavoidable. Swap zombies for aliens, and if you've played Valve's pioneering, late noughties co-op survival series, this will feel comfortingly familiar.

Waves of aliens will pop up constantly as you travel through the game, and typically completing an objective or arriving at a destination triggers another, bigger wave, or 'swarm'. And this is where the game gets good; like any good zombie-defense game, the action is best when you're outnumbered, and unlike shambling zombies, the aliens move fast and with a little more purpose.

There are plenty of varied weapon pick-ups along the way, so divvied up right, you can assign different combat roles to your team. Friendly fire is on—so you need to watch where your pals are and don't run into the line of fire. This adds to the need for conscious team-play, and since the aliens can and do seem to circle round behind you, watching each other's six is vital. Lose too much health, and you will be grounded, able to crawl and still fire a pistol, a bit like in *CoD*'s Zombies mode, and similarly your team-mates can help you up. If it takes them too long to get to you, it's not the end… although you will have to merely observe the action until they can resurrect you. If your whole team is down at once, it's *adios muchachos*.

The alien design borrows a lot from *Aliens* and *Pitch Black*; particularly in the fast moving, dog-like creatures, and glowing-headed ETs. They're scary enough to provide a sense of horror to your survival, but essentially the enemy types are very, very familiar.

There are gas-filled, exploding weirdos, huge wreckers, and end-wave bosses, toughest of which is a floaty squid thing that can teleport, particularly tough thanks to its shields, and because the hordes of

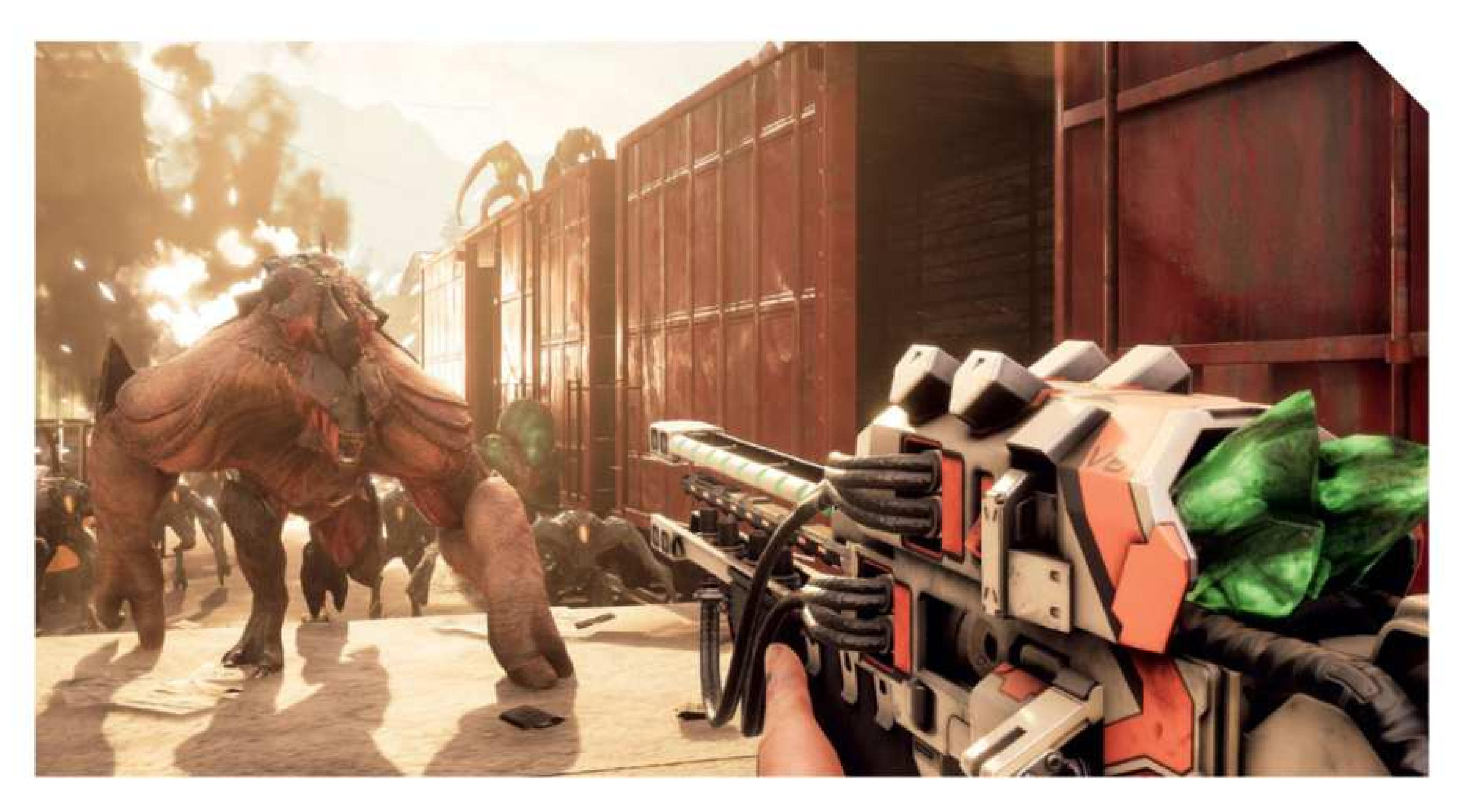
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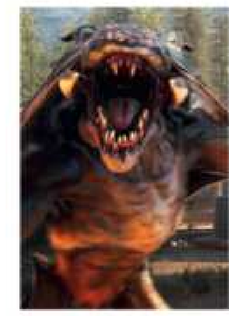
WHAT IS IT?
Four-player co-op survival FPS, where you're fighting off an alien invasion.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
Left 4 Dead with aliens. That's really it, though that's *a good thing*.

WHO'S IT FOR?
Fans of *Left 4 Dead*, arcade-style co-op shooters, aliens, B-movies, and B-movie aliens.

Holospark say that all future levels and gameplay related content will take the form of free updates, no matter which edition you buy





LEFT There are 20-odd different types of guns in the game, and they can be 3D printed!

"There's a charming B-movie feel to the rural US setting"

FAR LEFT Why is it every time aliens invade, the first thing they do is redecorate?

RIGHT Squad tactics really come into play when the aliens come at you in a 'swarm'.



monkey-armed dog-things don't let up just because their boss is there; they get the jump on you from behind while you're dealing with squiddy, and pull you down to give you a good mauling.

4 squad's sake

The dog-monkey things attack in numbers but they are satisfyingly ended with one shot from even the most basic of pistols. Satisfying, because one well-aimed shot from any gun should really be enough to put something down for good. Here is where the combat is at its most arcadey; it's easy to kill in genocidal numbers. The flipside of this is that the recoil, and even the death animations, don't really reflect the power of your weapon either. Okay, so they're not going for realism. Far from it; despite the horror survival vibe, there are almost *Fornite*-esque tower defense elements like random, quick-erecting door barricades and 3D printers. Power one up, and you can 3D-print a working, top of the line high-spec assault rifle. Read that sentence again, and it still sounds ridiculous.

There's not too much variety in either the level design or gameplay, so although enemies and pick-ups spawn a little differently each time, as a single-player experience it's fairly uninspired. The bots' AI is adequate, but it's best with three other humans, working as a squad and making sure you're able to keep each other alive. There's a charming, schlocky B-movie feel to the rural US setting and the dialogue between your squad, but the game lacks depth, and the kind of attachment to your team that we are expecting with the more deeply drawn characters of *Overkill's The Walking Dead*.

But considering *Earthfall*'s simple premise, arcade pace and low-budget origins, perhaps that's a little unfair. The game is cheaper than a triple-A title, though still pricey enough considering the game's lack of real depth or longevity.

That said, we miss *Left 4 Dead*; and if you're a fan of Valve's classic, and desperate for some L4D-style thrills, and can't wait for Overkill's new game, this is a pretty decent and low-priced stop-gap. ■

ET PHONE HOME...

The game features some imaginative alien design, which changes the nature of the combat, and means you and your squad need to play more tactically.

The 'Enrager' is a disgusting looking floating blob of offal, which projects anger. Kill it quickly or its rage affects all the other aliens and makes them stronger, faster, and angrier.

The 'Blackout' is a floaty squid thing that has an inconvenient energy shield, making it hard to kill. It fires barrages of lasers at you, and moves quickly. And then there's the Splitter. The Splitter vomits acid at you. Lovely.



OXM VERDICT

A playable and competent—if lightweight—crack at a *Left 4 Dead* style shooter.





EDITOR'S CHOICE

XBOX THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

PUBLISHER TEAM17 / **DEVELOPER** GHOST TOWN GAMES / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** OUT NOW / **COST** $24.99

Overcooked 2

WHO'S UP FOR SECONDS? IF YOU CAN GET SERVED... **DANIELLA LUCAS**

"Please sir, can we have some more?" we asked after Ghost Town Games' first serving of chaotic kitchen capers. Thankfully, unlike in *Oliver Twist*, they're a generous sort, and have given us a huge extra dollop of co-operative chopping and baking with sequel *Overcooked 2*.

This time, the Onion King has accidentally raised the 'unbread' after reading through an otherworldly recipe book and they're starting to devour everything. You'll have to travel to hone your skills as an expert chef in multiple kitchens in order to vanquish these yeasty fiends. It's all very silly and stuffed with overbaked puns, but it's a cute set-up to start you on your new culinary tour. At first you'll be chopping salads in simple kitchens, but eventually you'll be juggling baking several kinds of cake in a stage full of conveyer belts and other hazards. It's utter chaos, but delightful all the same.

The levels are even more varied than the first game, increasing in difficulty as the game progresses. From kitchen rafts where you have to chuck ingredients across to each other, to mines full of karts that change up where kitchen elements are. Our favorite is the hot-air balloon caught in a storm that sees you serving simple salads until it finally plummets into a sushi shop with an entirely new layout and new requests for maki rolls. That sudden change forces you to mix up your approach as you adjust to the new dishes you're expected to make, and results in some fun challenges.

Good mixers

However, some of the recipes get quite complicated, especially if you're on a level that uses mixers to beat things together for cakes. You have to throw quite a few things into them before chucking them in the oven to bake, but while most ingredients can be thrown straight in, you inexplicably need to chop up honey to put in them, which feels weirdly out of place for something that you usually get in liquid form. Steaming dumplings also feels a little odd, as you chuck flour straight in the mixer with your meat or fish, which doesn't sound very tasty to us. They're minor complaints, and it makes sense to do them this way from a gameplay simplicity perspective, but it does throw you off slightly when the cooking process doesn't always feel natural.

To balance out some of the more complicated dishes the requirements to reach certain star ratings have been lowered, and the stars needed to unlock later levels are also lower. So while it may be something of a struggle to get out much seafood pasta it won't hamper your ability to unlock levels and see the rest of the story. It does feel a little off-balance though. In the first game the challenge came in perfecting your skills over time, sometimes revisiting older levels with improved skills to get more stars to unlock levels, but here it's weighted more toward trying to get

short cut

WHAT IS IT?
A chaotic co-op cook-off that puts your coordination to the test.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
Kitchen Nightmares, but instead of Gordon Ramsay shouting at you it's your friends.

WHO'S IT FOR?
Anyone who wants a new game to play with their buddies.

Overcooked 2's cakes don't have any butter or sugar, definitely not a recipe we'd recommend for real baking



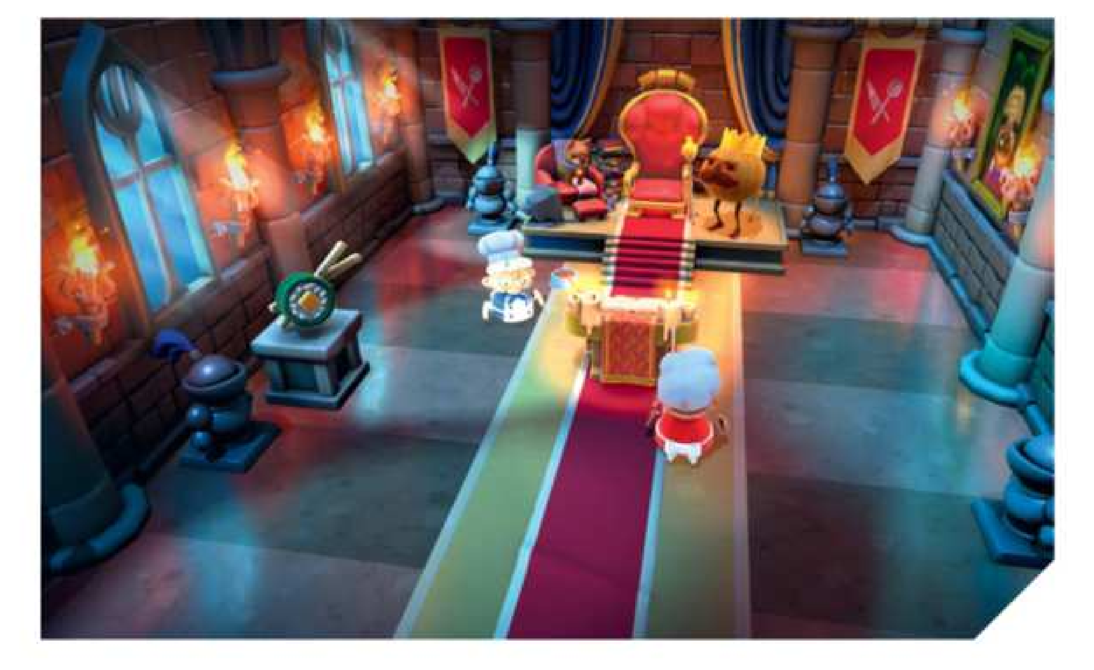


LEFT You can play solo by switching between two chefs and giving them tasks.

"A solid second serving of one of the best co-op games currently available"

FAR LEFT Versus mode gets super tough to keep track of if it's just one of you on each team.

RIGHT The Onion King is making a real hash of things again, so it's up to you to sort it out.



a decent handle on the recipes in the first place.

While *Overcooked 2* is best served with others, you can play it solo. You'll have two chefs to control that you swap between with a button press, so while you set one chef to chopping meat, the other can boil pasta or clean plates to serve up on. It's a little tricky splitting your thought process in two different directions, but it's workable.

Variety's the spice

As well as the main story mode to play through, this sequel introduces two new modes—arcade and versus—to add more variety. Arcade is great for parties, and sees you playing a random level from the game for a high score in quick rounds. Versus really changes things up, though, as the levels are designed for competitive rather than co-operative play. If four of you are playing you're split into two pairs facing off against each other, and if it's just two of you to start then you're each given an extra chef so you have two to jump between.

KEVIN'S CAPERS

While you're out battling the unbread in various kitchens occasionally you'll unlock secret levels engineered by the dog Kevin. These involve a little bit of exploration to reach on the map, and are quite a bit harder than the main levels. Great for a bonus challenge for those that like to punish themselves. Though don't beat yourself up if it takes you a few tries to finish them.

The versus stages are far more tricksy than anything from the story mode—in a water-based level you compete on two separate floating kitchens that rotate around each other, making it difficult to keep track of where you and your incoming orders are on the screen. The hardest we encountered was in a mine where the area into which you put your completed orders switched sides—if you let your attention drop and accidentally play your perfect tacos on the red team's belt where your blue team one was originally they'll get the credit for your order and your points. Something we learned the hard way unfortunately. It's wonderfully mean, and a great opportunity to get some seriously sneaky victories in over your friends.

On top of all of that, you've also got loads of new chef skins to unlock, and secret levels to find on a really cute overworld map while touring in your little bus. Yes, some of the new recipes are almost certainly overly complicated, but this is still a solid second serving of one of the best co-op games currently available, and an utter must if you like playing games with friends. ■



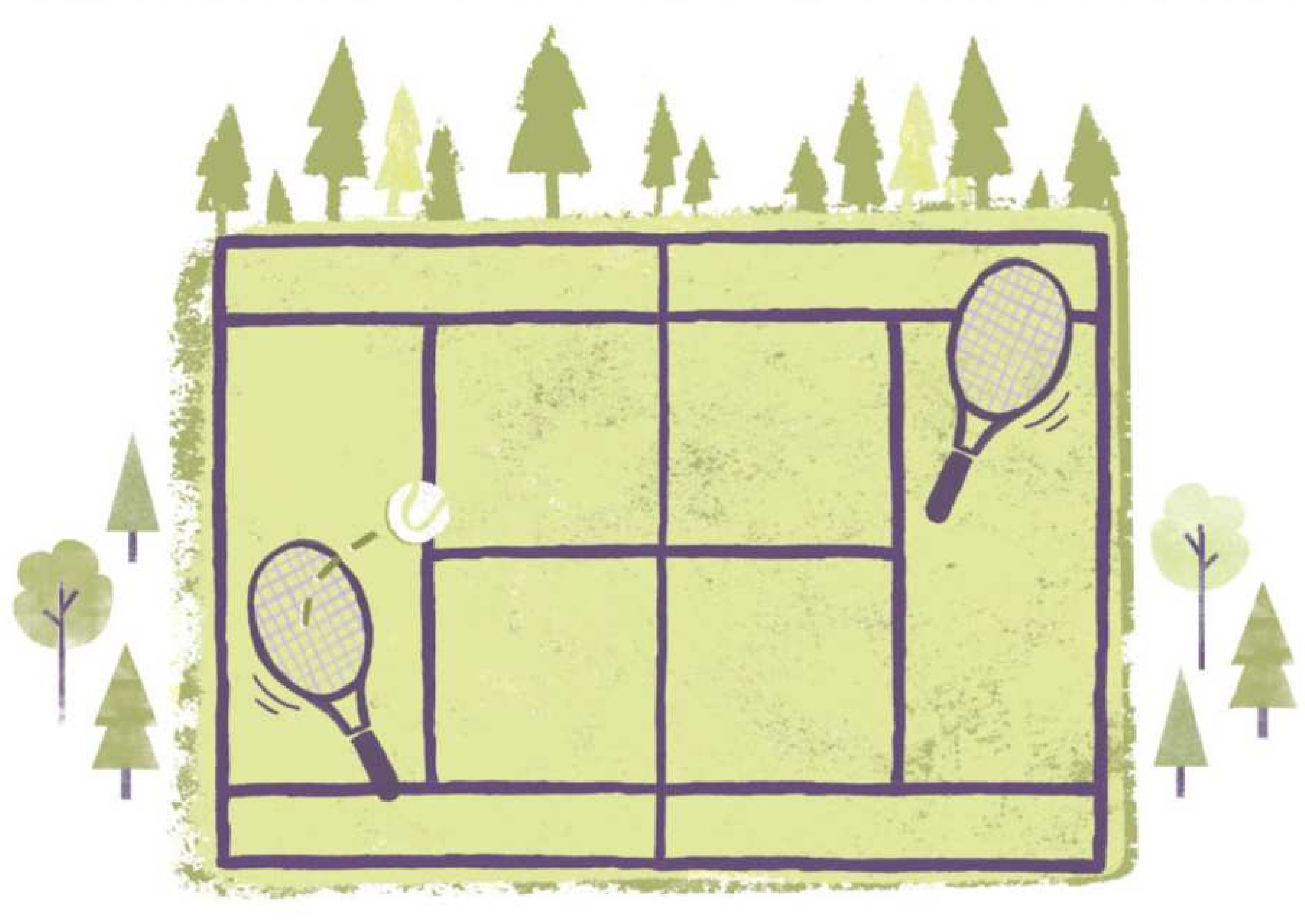
OXM VERDICT

Fantastic co-op mayhem, but complicated recipes sour the taste slightly.



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UNFAO, Global Forest Resources Assessment 2005-2015

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Two buttons is all you need in a fight, screw the likes of *Tekken* and *Mortal Kombat*

PUBLISHER MESSHOF GAMES / **DEVELOPER** MESSHOF GAMES / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** OUT NOW / **COST** $14.99

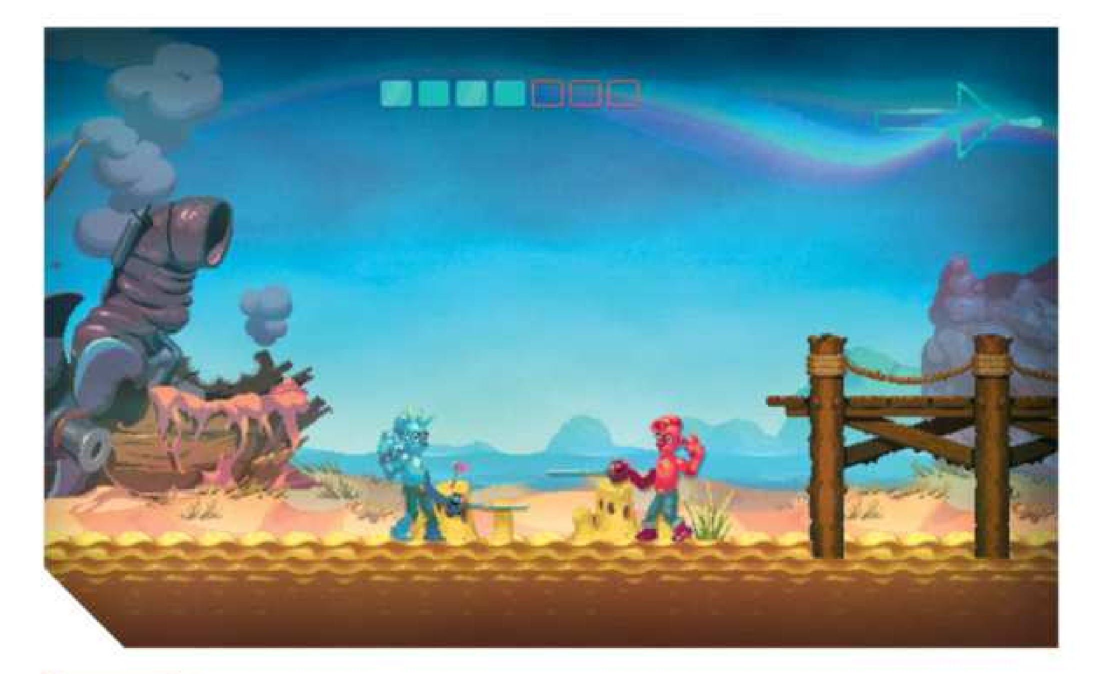
Nidhog 2

QUICK FIRE DUELS PERFECTED **DANIELLA LUCAS**

Some people treat 'simple' like it's a dirty word that means 'dumbed down'. Not so at OXM Towers; we love simple. Maybe it's because we've been described that way ourselves before, but mostly it's because it also means something that's been broken down to basics that have been perfectly refined. Which exactly describes the essence of duelling game *Nidhog 2*.

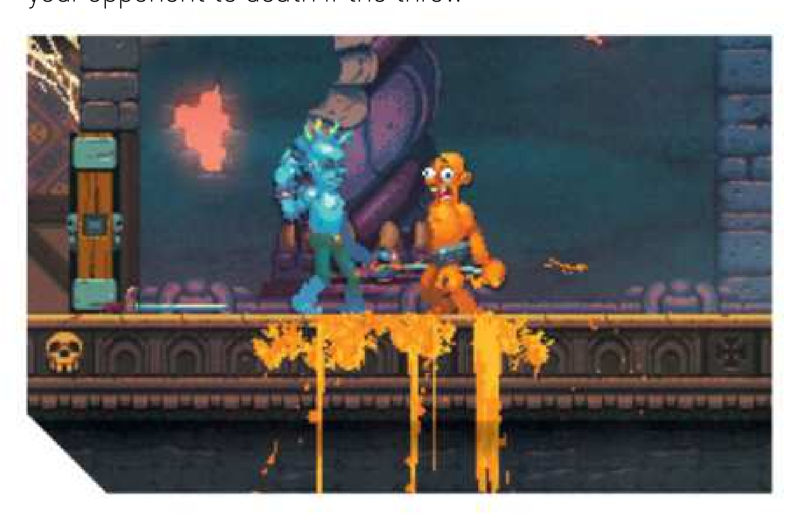
This is a follow-up to the barebones but also excellent first *Nidhog* game, which came out in 2014, but with a completely new look and added extras. It never quite made it to Xbox One, but at least we've got this excellent little two-button fighter in its fuller form now. The aim is simple, you have to duel your way from the middle of a stage to your opponent's end of it via several screens. It involves a lot of back and forth—you may kill your opponent in one hit and gain a few meters, but they'll keep spawning back in ahead of you, so you'll have to keep fighting to reach the high honor of being devoured by a giant, fleshy worm thing. A far better result than a medal.

You only have two main buttons—one for attacking and one for jumping—on top of your directional movement, but you can do a lot with them. Jump kicks, forward rolls, crawling and setting the height of your blade to out-maneuver your foe as you stab your way to victory are the order of the day. You can even throw your sword for a ranged attack and punch your opponent to death if the throw misses and you're left bladeless. Each move is easy to execute and makes for lots of swift but satisfying tussles as you push each other back and forth across the entire length of the arena.



LEFT Force your opponent to their end of the stage, and you get eaten by a big worm. Result!

BELOW The more you fight and die, the messier each stage becomes.



short cut

WHAT IS IT?
A one-on-one duelling game with tight controls and bright violence.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
It's what happens when your plasticine models start getting a little too fighty.

WHO'S IT FOR?
People looking for a great, simple way to beat their friends.

"While the game may be small, it also doesn't break the bank"

Guts and glory

Each death is surprisingly violent. Everything may have the look of plasticine about it, but when you get a kill your enemies explode into a shower of neon blood and guts that drip down the stage, staining the spot of their demise. Each screen can end up looking like a Jackson Pollock painting if you're particularly evenly matched. It's gross, but also hilarious in a childish way, especially if your foe gets stuck on the pointy end of your weapon so you can extend their demise.

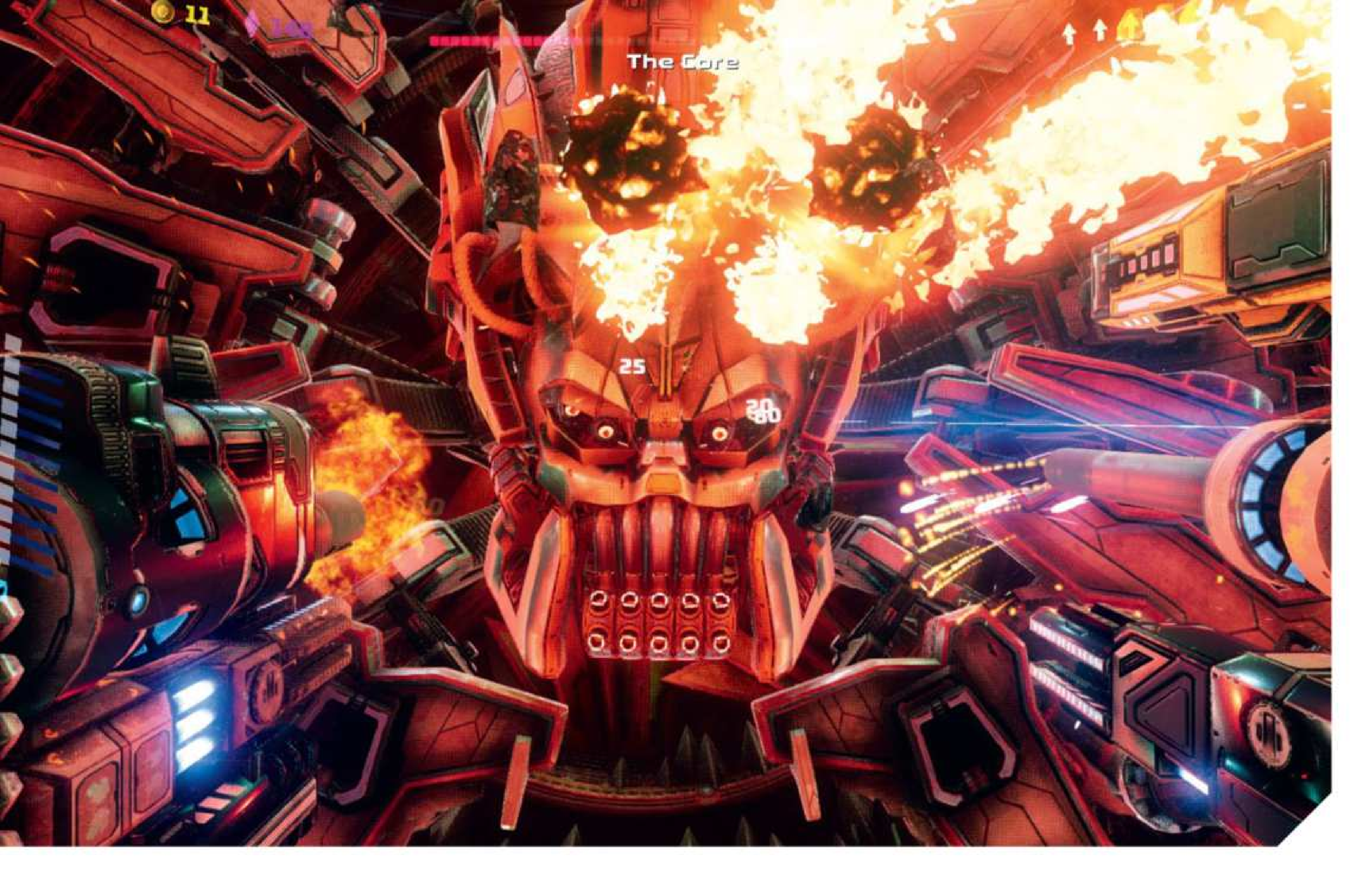
If fencing blades aren't for you, there's a bow and arrow, a broadsword, and a dagger to subtly mix up your fighting style in your quest for spiritual enlightenment via navigating flying worm intestines, each with its own advantages. There's also eight stages to fight in, full of bright, detail-filled backgrounds and obstacles—double the amount in the original, but we still wish there were more of them. Some have basic jumping to consider while you're battling, while others feature obscured areas to hide behind. You can also customize your character with various different body parts if you wish.

Playing this solo does the mechanics a disservice as the AI isn't particularly challenging, but it does make for a quick playthrough. It's best played with others and is fantastic for tournaments where you take turns to play one another. Each round can be filled with drama and surprise comebacks thanks to the quick nature of each individual encounter within a level. And while the game may be small, it also doesn't break the bank—at $14.99 it hits the perfect price point for a few rounds of quick fun for you and your pals to repeatedly dive back into. ■



OXM VERDICT
Perfectly balanced fights in a small package, we just wish there were more stages.





PUBLISHER GRIP DIGITAL / **DEVELOPER** GRIP DIGITAL/TERRIBLE POSTURE GAMES / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** JULY 2018 / **COST** $24.99

Mothergunship

SAVE THE PLANET FROM DESTRUCTION ONE MOD AT A TIME **ADAM BRYANT**

Never mind delving deep into a sprawling narrative or spending hundreds of hours exploring new worlds. Sometimes you just want to shoot things and blow stuff up. When you come across a game that does this well and you have a blast playing it, you wonder if there's any point in playing anything else. That may be a slight over-exaggeration, because *Mothergunship* certainly isn't perfect, but it has a lot going it for it.

There is a story nestled away somewhere in this bullet-hell first-person shooter in which an alien race of sentient machines, called the Archivists, surround Planet Earth with a fleet of spaceships taking it hostage, and it's up to you and your freedom-fighting friends to save it, but that's far from the main focus of the game. It's main focus is in its gameplay, which is evident at the beginning of the game when you're thrust straight into the action.

This is where you're introduced to the heart and soul of this game: The weapon customization. In *Mothergunship*, you create your own weapons from a multitude of different parts, which you can purchase with coins picked up from enemies. You can be as elaborate as you can possibly think to be, provided that everything fits together. These mods fall into three categories: Connectors, barrels, and caps. The connectors essentially form the frame of your weapon and contain slots for you to add barrels, caps, or even other connectors. Barrels are just different weapon types that you'll fire, such as rockets, lasers, or chain guns. Lastly, the caps will modify your weapons even further by adding things like ricochet mods or anti-gravity mods. There's almost an unlimited variety of weapon combinations, and it's exciting when you come up with something that seems like it shouldn't work, but does. Using your new toys, your mission is to destroy the leader of the fleet, the Mothergunship, once and for all.

short cut

WHAT IS IT?
A bullet-hell first-person shooter where you take on an alien armada.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
A mix of *Doom*'s fast-paced action and *R-Type*'s hectic gunplay.

WHO'S IT FOR?
Anyone who's into shooting things and asking questions later.

What follows then is a series of procedurally generated levels filled with dozens of enemies and hundreds of bullets flying in your direction. It can be difficult to discern exactly what's going on at any moment, so you just end up shooting madly around the room hoping for the best. It's hectic, but it's one hell of a ride.

Having a blast

The levels are procedurally generated to a point. Meaning that the placement of enemies within them is almost always unique, but the level maps appear to cycle randomly within a set template. So you may find yourself in a familiar room where the enemies are different.

As well as the main campaign there are side missions, too. These reward you with weapons mods, coins, or experience. There's even an Endless mission mode which unlocks after completing the first few missions and is for those who want to fight against increasingly difficult enemies and survive as long as possible.

One of the characters is a frog, which is most likely a reference to Nintendo's *Star Fox* franchise



LEFT Take out the glowing pillars first. They heal all enemies around it.

"Although fun, every mission in the game has almost exactly the same setup"

FAR LEFT Don't die, otherwise you'll have to start all the way from the beginning.

RIGHT The majority of missions will give you a reward upon completing them.



Although fun to play, every mission in the game has almost exactly the same setup. You battle through a variety of different rooms to reach the end of the level, where you either fight a boss or press a big red self-destruct button to destroy the alien ship. Even the bosses themselves aren't that interesting or really any different from the standard enemies you come across. They're just larger and bigger bullet sponges.

No progress

One major frustration is the complete absence of checkpoints during missions. This only serves to discourage rather than make the player feel any sense of risk during levels. It's not so bad early on in the game, but as you progress the levels get increasingly harder, and you'll frequently find yourself starting from the beginning of the level regardless of the progress you've made. This is compounded by the fact that any mods you take with you at the start of the mission or earned during your run are lost should you die. This in turn has a follow-on effect on your ability to actually complete the level, by losing your powerful gear and making it even harder to progress.

As you gain experience, you level up and obtain points which you can spend on your armor to get certain permanent stat bonuses that you can begin each level with. Things like movement speed, additional jumps, energy recharge rate, and extra protection for environmental hazards. Thankfully, you're not stuck with how you choose to distribute the points, as you can always redistribute them elsewhere in between missions at no cost. This is particularly handy when you've been struggling with a particular mission and you've lost too many mods, thereby reducing your chances of completing the mission.

It's not perfect, no, but the great thing about *Mothergunship* is that it knows how ridiculous it is. Whether it's through the gameplay or the dialogue between characters, it doesn't shy from it. It's because of this that it manages to get away with some of the more questionable game design choices and makes it endearing, one which we'll keep returning to.

FUN AND GAMES

We won't spoil the plot as to why, but when you complete the main campaign and defeat the Mothership you'll get the opportunity to take it on again. Only this time it's much, much harder and you'll need to complete six different missions to gain access to it. What's more, if you die at any point before destroying the ship you'll need to complete the six missions all over again. If you manage to defeat the ship then you'll move up to Rank 2, and the process starts all over again.



OXM VERDICT

A fun, frenetic first-person shooter that suffers from a few frustrating flaws.



The complete soundtrack of the game, comprised of almost 40 tracks, is hidden within the credits menu

PUBLISHER ATARI / **DEVELOPER** LLAMASOFT / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** OUT NOW / **COST** $19.99

Tempest 4000

OLD-SCHOOL GAMEPLAY THAT'S FAR FROM BEING OLD HAT **WARREN BROWN**

If you learn one thing today let it be the phrase 'tube shooter'. No it's not slang for YouTube vlogging, but rather a very specific sub-category of Shmup, styled around fixed axis gameplay.

A genre unto itself, it originated with the 1981 arcade release of *Tempest*, a game centered around a series of vector wire-frame surfaces and tubes, divided equally into lanes that the player 'shoots down'. All the action takes place in and around the 'web', and players must defend and clear all enemies before progressing on to the next stage. A simple premise, but when legendary developer Jeff Minter is involved, all sense of mundanity is thrown out the window.

This new iteration is an Atari-branded variant of the psychedelic Llamasoft shooter *TxK*, previously released for the Sony Vita, but it's easier to regard *T4K* as a successor to *Tempest 2000*, published by Atari for their last home console, the Jaguar, way back in '94. The game retains both the classic arcade action and an urge for 'just one more go'. Evolution is mostly in the form of art style, with enhanced visuals providing an ocular treat for the senses.

Block rockin' bleats

Accompanying the visuals is the original '90s techno soundtrack featuring iconic tunes such as 'Mind's Eye', 'Digital Terror', and 'Constructive Demolition'. Minter isn't afraid to mix in a few bleats with those beats, and Llamasoft is famed for the inclusion of its favorite beastie audio samples, so expect the inclusion of fluffy mammalian SFX.

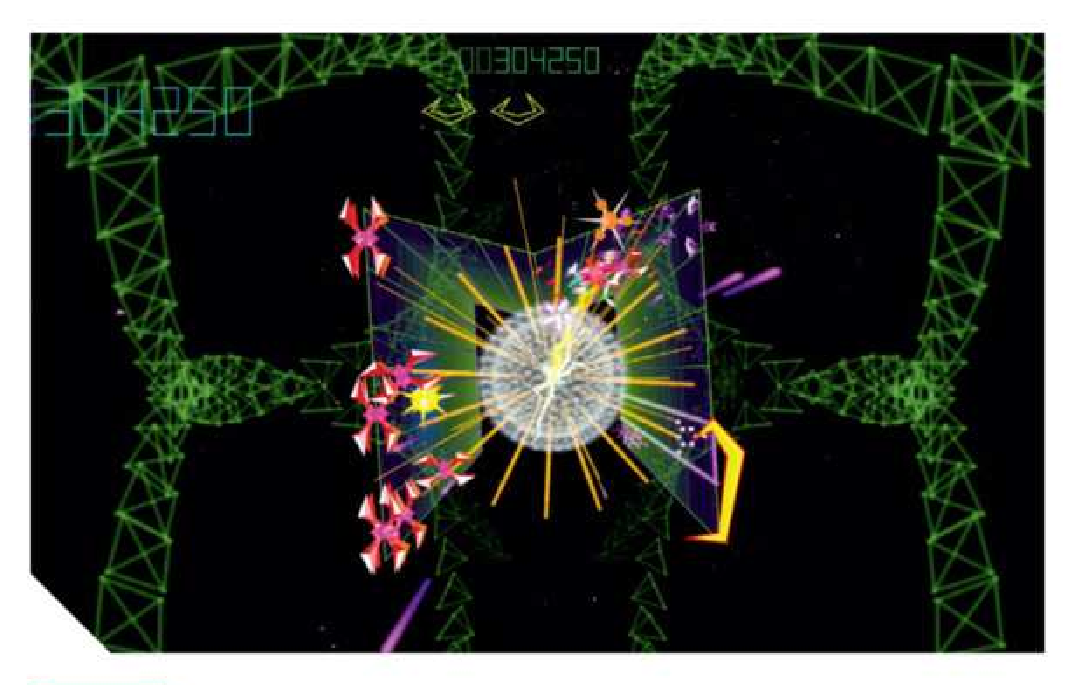
Players can select one of three modes: Classic, Pure, and Survival, and each is a different take on the core game. General rule of thumb is shoot everything while avoiding physical contact with anything other than the power-up tokens, which are generated by destroying a random enemy.

There's some subtle tweaks to returning power-ups; the Superzapper now has the ability to be fired after an enemy grabs the Claw, and the rather helpful AI droid offers a similar chance to rescue your craft, but only if it's in close proximity.

Control is now more fluid thanks to added inertia, and the analog stick makes for an interesting substitute to a rotary controller. It feels a little woolly compared to previous iterations, and we found it lacked the precision that the D-pad offers.

The jump upgrade is the most important ability, as it enables players to launch off of the web and clear of invading enemies. Other new additions such as Beauty and Moo-moo turn each lane of the web into a weapon, vaporizing any enemies caught traveling up it. Both abilities grant a temporary invincibility, and their resulting activation makes for a gratifying empowerment, but as everything resets when progressing to a new level, it's short-lived.

The addition of mini-bonus warps between stages and a multitude of new enemy types that can affect the very nature of the web are excellent additions. With 100 vibrant levels to work through, the action can sometimes feel non-stop, and seeing that there's no multiplayer option the competitive urge only exists in the form of a solitary slog to the top of the leader boards. Essentially this is a high score attack game, so it won't be to everyone's taste. For those that care though, Atari and the Yak are back, and together they want you to feed your head to the web. OXM says let's go!



RIGHT Timing the firing of the superzapper weapon becomes crucial in later stages. That's you, the Claw, on the right, BTW.

"With 100 vibrant levels the action can sometimes feel non-stop"

short cut

WHAT IS IT?
The latest entry in a series of excellent *Tempest* sequels by Jeff Minter.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
A hell of a lot like *TxK*, essentially this is the Atari-branded final cut. Maybe...

WHO'S IT FOR?
Arcade veterans and fans of Minter games that appeared on commercially-challenged consoles.





OXM VERDICT
A stonking update for a forgotten classic, complete with all new bells and (rave) whistles.



The first ever episode of *Adventure Time* to go into production was entitled 'The Enchiridion'. It was broadcast as Season 1, Episode 5

PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO / **DEVELOPER** CLIMAX STUDIOS / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** OUT NOW / **COST** $29.99

Adventure Time: Pirates Of The Enchiridion

IT'S ABOUT TIME THE LAND OF OOO HOSTED A PROPER ACTION-RPG **STEVE BOXER**

Every generation has a TV cartoon it discovers young, but which stays with it for life. For those who had reached a sentient state by 2008, when it first aired, Cartoon Network's *Adventure Time* will surely fulfil that role. Following the adventures of a boy called Finn and his magical, morphing yellow-orange dog Jake in the bizarre land of Ooo, *Adventure Time* may be kid-friendly, with a subtly moral tale delivered in each episode, but it's so gloriously surreal and gleefully weird that it has plenty of adult appeal, too. It's pretty much the only cartoon series that any parent can safely watch with their offspring without thinking the words: "Kill me now".

Previous games based on the show have been horrifically amateurish. This, mercifully, isn't. Developed by veteran British outfit Climax Studios, and published by Bandai Namco, it's a proper, open-world action-RPG that takes some cues from the *Zelda* games, has an excellent turn-based battling system and completely nails *Adventure Time*'s signature mix of humor, cuteness, and weirdness.

Time for adventure

The game begins with Finn and Jake indulging in a spot of stargazing in the boat that sits handily atop their house. The next day, they wake up to discover that the whole of Ooo has been mysteriously flooded. Swiftly commandeering a bigger, faster boat, they set out to find out what happened and save the day, beginning their quest in the Ice Kingdom, which has melted, thus causing the flood.

RIGHT You gradually assemble a full team including Marceline and BMO, the sentient Game Boy.





short cut

WHAT IS IT?
An open-world action-RPG set in the world of the popular cartoon TV show.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
Amusingly true to the funny and bizarre world of *Adventure Time*, and not a bad example of an RPG, either.

WHO'S IT FOR?
Kids, mainly (it's 7-rated), but it's good enough that adults might sneakily enjoy it, too.

"It nails AT's mix of humor, cuteness, and weirdness"

Various gameplay mechanics are swiftly introduced, most notably a classic turn-based battle system which is pretty simple to grasp, but has plenty of depth thanks to an action-points system that lets you perform special attacks, along with a vast inventory of objects that heal, cure, or buff basic attacks.

There are puzzle sequences, too—often involving a character's special ability. Marceline, the guitar-wielding Vampire Queen, for example, can turn herself invisible for short periods, so must often undertake stealth sequences. And there are hilarious interrogation sequences in which you must decide whether to make Jake and Finn play good cop or bad cop.

Unsurprisingly, given its young target audience, *Pirates Of The Enchiridion* is pretty forgiving. It's littered with smashables that provide in-game cash and useful objects, along with shops that transform the former into the latter. It also has an unexpectedly sophisticated leveling-up system that lets you upgrade individual attributes with cash, so you can shape your party to your preferred battle-style.

Pirates Of The Enchiridion will delight any *Adventure Time* fan. It's consistently funny—it can even make you grin in the course of a battle—and brilliantly captures the essence of the TV series all the way through. And when viewed purely as an RPG, it has a surprising amount of credibility. At last, there's an *Adventure Time* game which is truly worth playing. ■



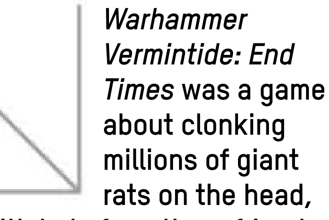
OXM VERDICT
A proper (if short) RPG which perfectly captures the joys of *Adventure Time*.



PUBLISHER FATSHARK / **DEVELOPER** FATSHARK / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** OUT NOW / **COST** $29.99

Warhammer: Vermintide 2

DON YOUR FAVORITE MAGIC ARMOR FOR SOME SUBLIME CO-OP SMASHING **TOM SENIOR**



***Warhammer Vermintide: End Times* was a game about clonking millions of giant rats on the head, ideally with help from three friends. You run through gothic towns from the Warhammer universe, splatting hordes and fending off the odd boss monster until you reach the end, at which point you level up and unlock some new weapons and armor.**

The sequel features more of the same glorious first-person violence, only this time the giant rat men have allied with an army of bodybuilders who have pledged allegiance to the evil Chaos gods. The new levels are more varied and exciting than the first game's too. You fight through miserable overrun towns, stone-hewn cities, and even the occasional sunny forest on a bloody trip across the Old World.

The moment-to-moment action has splendid heft, whether you're blunderbussing enemies or igniting them with a fireball staff. There are five heroes to choose from, and each has three sub-classes that you slowly unlock as you level up. The dwarf can be a tank, a ranged specialist or, best of all, a half-naked 'slayer' with devastating damage output. The wood elf Kerillian can be a long-range bow specialist or a stealthy character who strikes effectively from behind. Alternatively you can run with a fire wizard, a knight, or a sneery witch hunter with two pistols.

Tool up

As you keep leveling and opening chests, you furnish your characters with a wide range of weapons that significantly alter their function in battle. We particularly enjoy the fire wizard's rapid-fire staff that bombards enemies with the ferocity of a *Call Of Duty* submachine gun, but you might prefer Kruber's huge two-handed hammers, or Kerillian's dual blades. Between the subclasses and weapon options, you can specialize effectively. If you're lacking a sniper to pick off special enemies at distance you can normally rummage through your loot to find a suitable tool.

Playing a role effectively is a big part of the fun of team play, especially when the game throws overwhelming forces at you. The hordes you face are marshalled by the level's AI, which means you never quite know whether the next turn will reveal a rat army or a particularly nasty combination of special enemies, or all at once. Special enemies include tough Chaos spawn, who can pick you up and fling you repeatedly into the floor with a giant tentacle arm. Also look out for assassins—who can leap great distances and pin down a stray teammate—and sneaky rats with long hooks who like to drag you away from your pals and string you up in a corner.

If you do get overwhelmed by the enemy you enter a downed state, and have to wait on a teammate to come rescue you. If you can find the time in the middle of a melee, you can stave off this point with a hastily chugged health potion. These are in

short cut

WHAT IS IT?
First-person co-op combat game—you fight through cities from Warhammer's Old World.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?
A gory, frantic fight for survival with calm bits where you open treasure chests to unlock new weapons.

WHO'S IT FOR?
Groups of friends looking for 40-minute bursts of fun.

They say you're never more than six feet away from a rat. In *Vermintide* you're rarely more than six feet from 20





LEFT Some sections, like this Skaven lair, will always be full of rat creatures.

"The new levels are more varied and exciting than the first game's"

FAR LEFT This rat ogre died doing what he loved: Smashing imperial soldiers with big mangy paws.

RIGHT Hordes feature many different types of enemy.

short supply, so you need to manage them carefully and keep an eye out for more as you explore the levels. You can also find bombs, strength, and speed potions, as well as a potion that fills up your special action bar. Each character has a special ability that recharges as you splat foes. Some are better than others. Kruber yells so loud enemies nearby are thrown back (useful), while the fire wizard just sets her feet on fire and leaves a fire trail where she walks (not useful, but cool).

Having a laugh

The Skaven rat men and the Chaos factions both have great personality, and Fatshark has done an excellent job of capturing Warhammer's sense of humor. *Vermintide* owes a large debt to *Left 4 Dead*, but it's rich with jokes, and features some of the best first-person melee combat in any game.

Only a few minor quibbles let it down. The enemy AI director can get a little too trigger happy, causing sudden difficulty spikes that can wipe out a low level party very quickly, and when your party wipes you have to start these sometimes lengthy levels again from the start.

Challenge is good, and you can't win every time, but this particularly affects low level players who don't have the loot or expertize to fairly compete. The developers are still tweaking and patching the game to give new players more early experience, along with extra treasure chests, to get over this hump. Once you reach level five, and you can start unlocking stat buffs for your characters, progress is smoother.

It's worth noting that while you can play *Vermintide 2* solo, it's much better with friends and voice chat. If you're a regular crew looking for a solid action game that doesn't feel too grindy, *Vermintide 2* is a great choice. Even if the loot and levelling eventually get a little stale, blasting the head off a bloated Chaos marauder still feels immense. On a good run the game pushes your party to the brink of death while giving you just enough health potions and rest points to let you fight back and overcome. It feels awesome to stumble into the exit portal with three friends after an exhausting trial, laughing and covered head to toe in bits of rat. ■

BOX OF TOYS

Vermintide 2 features treasure chests, but these aren't paid-for microtransaction loot boxes. Instead you win them by completing levels and ticking off achievements. Hidden in the levels you might find loot dice that improve your chances of getting good loot from your chests once the level is done. Chests typically contain weapons and items you equip to your characters, and crafting materials that you can eventually use to build your own gear.

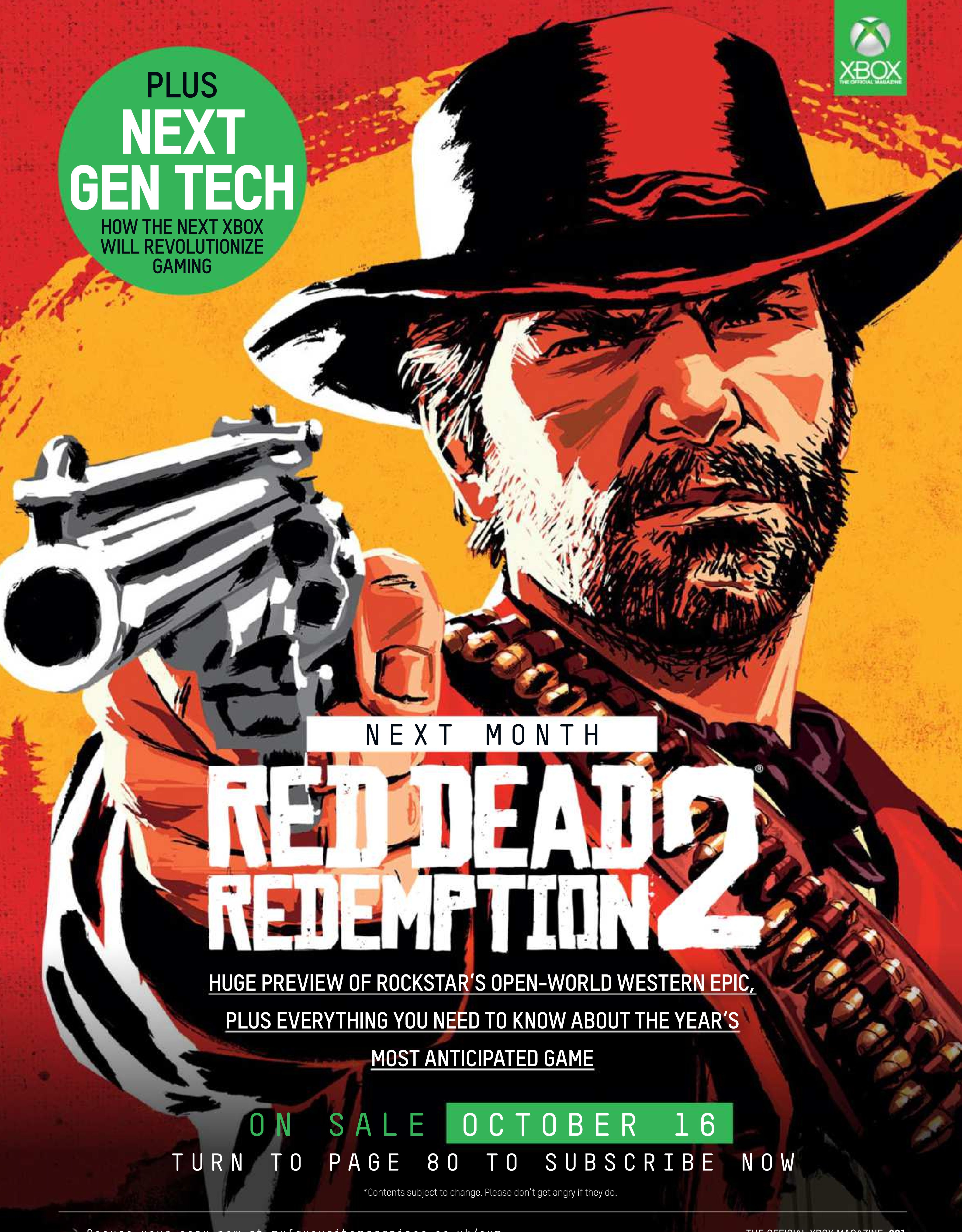




OXM VERDICT

Strong, satisfying melee combat and smart levels make for a great sequel. Best with friends.



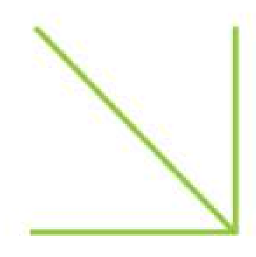


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*Contents subject to change. Please don't get angry if they do.


extra
Get more from your Xbox
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With *Cyberpunk 2077* now officially on the way, it felt like a good time to revisit CD ProjektRed's other amazing RPG **The Witcher 3** on p84. It's been sitting at the number one spot in our 'must-have' Xbox One games list for three years now, so we go back to see if it's still worthy of that top position, or if it's time for a new king on the console. Elsewhere, we're taking a look back at the classic original **BioShock** (p88). It's 11 years old now, and yet it still manages to capture our imaginations with its undersea world—we explore how it is able to still grip us over a decade later. We're also celebrating all things blocky in our 'Why I Love' piece on **LEGO games** over on p92. You'd think we'd be tired of them after getting a new themed LEGO game pretty much every year, but there's something wonderful about their humorous and familiar antics that makes them a constant safe bet if you want a light adventure. Bring on even more LEGO games please. Finally, you should think about getting a few stretches and a warm-up in before turning to p94 and joining us for **the best dance moves in Xbox history.** It's sweaty work being able to move this well, and we've got everything from formal ballroom dances to *Fortnite* flossing on show. It's time to bust out your moves—don't be shy.







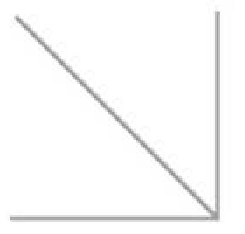




Keep an eye out for this badge over the next few pages: It indicates when a game of old can be booted up in shiny Xbox One-o-vision.

CHECK OUT OUR VAST LIBRARY OF XBOX FEATURES AT WWW.GAMESRADAR.COM/OXM





NOW PLAYING



Attempting to push the role-playing in The Witcher 3, we find that the fantasy RPG's hero Geralt is not about to change

CHRIS BURKE

PUBLISHER CD PROJEKT RED / **DEVELOPER** CD PROJEKT RED / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** MAY 2015



Despite the massive popularity of *The Witcher 3*, I've only just got around to playing it. As a fan of RPGs, with quite a few demanding my time, I was a little afraid to dive into such a huge game. But now, spurred on by news of its Polish devs' forthcoming RPG, *Cyberpunk 2077*, I finally decided to enter Geralt of Rivia's fantasy world.

You join **OXM**'s belated playthrough early-ish in the story as I track down Geralt's ward Ciri to a Temerian Baron, who has hosted her at his castle. There's a catch to finding out where she went next—I must find his missing wife and daughter. I learn the wife had a miscarriage, and he's buried the baby's body in an unmarked grave. Uh-oh. Consulting with a hermit, I discover the dead baby's become a malignant spirit. The hermit will help me use this Botchling's blood ties to find Missus Baron, if I find his goat. Off I go into the woods, ringing a little bell so 'Princess' will follow me home.

The Botchling is a red, angry baby, crawling around its own grave. Shiver. I can calm the Botchling, and turn it into a benevolent spirit, or kill it again. I opt for the former. I'm not sure what I did wrong, but it transforms into a big demon that I have to kill. So while I'm immersed and invested in the drama and horror of the story, my choice appears to have meant nothing.



Are you Ciri-ous?

This brings me to my slight niggle with *The Witcher 3*: Specifically, calling it an RPG. 'Role-playing game' is a term that's thrown at so many games, it's almost lost its meaning. And if you're going to say that playing as a character with such a deep and established back story, beloved of an already rabid fan base, is 'role-playing', then you might just as well call *Halo* an RPG. Or *Mario Kart*.

An RPG should be about more than just leveling up, changing clothes, and 'romancing' an NPC on the back of a stuffed unicorn [spoiler]. Even short of the extensive customization of, say, *Skyrim*, at the very least you need to be able to define your character by class, with a unique skill-set—a choice in *how* you play, thus defining *who you are*, at an early stage. But Geralt is Geralt. He's had two previous games to his name and a bunch of novels. In fact, so rich and complete is the game's story, I could probably watch every beautiful looking and wonderfully voice-acted and scripted cutscene back-to-back (you can on YouTube, if you've got 13 hours) and not even pick up a controller.

In a true RPG you'd have freedom of choice in what you do. But you can have all the choices you can shake a dialogue-branch at, if ultimately your decisions don't make much difference to how the game plays out, it's not a proper RPG either. *The Witcher 3* has plenty of RPG *elements* like XP and crafting, but they really only affect combat. So let's not call this an RPG. It's an *open-world adventure*. With 'romance' on a stuffed unicorn.

Anyhow, back to the game. My search takes me to Oxenfurt. At the main gate, jobsworth soldiers inform me the city is on lockdown, and I need some sort of pass to get in. I don't have one, and I've got no idea what city official I need to 'romance' to get one. So, I nick a boat and sail round to the other side of the city, and walk right in. Yeah! Sticking it to the man!

This is the first time in the game



that I've seen a city; so far I've only experienced one-horse villages (and that horse has been Roach), where all I've done is visit taverns for a drink, a fight, and a game of Gwent. The city feels really... *real*. Oxenfurt is how I imagine a medieval Thames-side London might have felt; wisps of smoke float on the air, there's an early morning foggy light and the atmosphere is tangible, its streets alive. So, forgetting my quest, I decide that since, in RPGs, cities reasonably tend to present the most things to do, I'm going to push this RPG thing as far as it will stretch, and head for the biggest city on the map—Novigrad.

Hair today...

Upon entering Novigrad, the first thing I see is a barbers. Ahh, an RPG-like chance to alter my look! But again, I'm Geralt. I mean, I'm never going to be able to give myself corn-rows like in *GTA*'s hairdressers, am I? Or am I? There's an option for an 'Elven Rebel cut', but I come out looking... exactly the same. I'm low on coin, and I spend almost my last money on trying again; for long, loose hair. I get a boy-band cut that frankly looks soooo wrong on the White Wolf. The barber's drunk—whatever I choose, he does what he wants. I try instead to customize my beard. The very last of my gold goes on this, and, oh dear, now I'm stuck with a soul-patch...

"I could probably just watch all the cutscenes back-to-back and not even pick up the controller"

WHAT IS IT?

Brilliantly crafted open-world fantasy RPG with a hugely immersive story. That may, or may not, really be an RPG.

Novigrad is even more busily beautiful and alive than Oxenfurt. People have conversations, crowds dance and shout, and drunks stagger into me. Strumpets proposition me for 'romance', and random folk call me an 'arsemunch'. At least one of those must be down to the soul patch.

In need of a job, I check out a noticeboard. There is tons to do, and quests keep popping as I walk around. But most are way too high level, I think I've got ahead of myself by coming here. I agree to track down an imp that's been stealing from a merchant. This turns out to be a shape-changer; he turns into Geralt, and I have to beat myself, as it were. I decide to spare his life, provided he leaves town, and return to the merchant for my reward. Since I have no proof of the imp's death, he pays me only half. Once again, I run into 'RPG' difficulties. Every fibre of my evil being wants to unleash violence upon this arsemunch, but, since Geralt is a better man than I, I have to walk away.

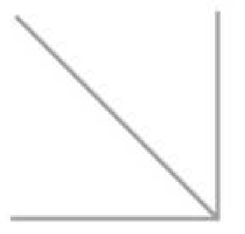
So, thwarted in my 'role-playing', I go back to enjoying Geralt's adventure. And I'm still playing the game seven hours later, well into the night. It's not the monster-fighting that's keeping me hooked, or any need for RPG grinding. *The Witcher 3*'s story is intensely rich and its environments stunningly realized; and more than anything right now, I *need to know* what happened to the Baron's family. This is a detective story as much as it's an RPG, and Geralt's a detective, who uses his Witcher senses to gain insight and peel away the onion-layers of a deep, engaging tale. It's one of the many reasons the game is rightly lauded, and why I'm now hooked. Bring on *Cyberpunk 2077*—because if CD Projekt Red can pour all the *Witcher 3*'s genius into a full, *proper* RPG, it's going to be amazing. ■

ABOVE Geralt's horse Roach. Mind of its own, and doesn't even like sugarlumps.

FAR LEFT We love you, Geralt—don't ever change! Oh, you can't really change much, can you?

PLAYED ANYTHING GOOD RECENTLY? COME SHARE IT AT WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/OXMUK





NOW PLAYING



Dead means dead in **Dishonored 2's** Iron Mode. What could possibly go wrong? **ALEX SPENCER**

PUBLISHER BETHESDA / **DEVELOPER** ARKANE STUDIOS / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** NOVEMBER 2016

Prey's Mooncrash expansion, which added permadeath as part of its new roguelike-style mode, gave me an idea. Arkane's previous game, *Dishonored 2*, features a custom difficulty mode—could I use that to attempt my own DIY version? The settings do allow me to turn off saves, and turn on 'Iron Mode'. Meaning if I die at any point, it's back to the start of the entire game. Yikes.

Skipping through the opening cutscenes, I pick the freshly dethroned empress Emily Kaldwin over Corvo, star of the original *Dishonored*. I've previously played through this sequel as both characters, setting a different challenge each time: Never kill anyone, never get spotted. With no saves to fall back on, though, those simply aren't an option here. Pacifist Emily is dead; long live stab-everyone-on-sight Emily.

Sticking to the shadows, on the other hand? That could be useful. Tapping into knowledge from that stealth playthrough, I locate the spot where you can jump from a tiled roof onto a train cart that lets you skip pretty much the entire first level. Brilliant. Except I forget about a low-hanging obstacle, and get knocked onto the electrified tracks.

Back to the start it is, this time plumping for old reliable Corvo. This time I actually remember to jump, and the train speeds me to the other side of the map, where I dive into the sea, and swim over to the waiting ship.

On the blink

On the sunnier shores of Karnaca, the real adventure begins. Omnipotent mascara-and-Morrissey fan The Outsider has returned my magical powers—including Blink, an ability that lets me teleport up to the rooftops, where I can safely scurry around. I make my way towards the objective, trying to avoid any shiny, dangerous distractions along the way.

Like, for example, the five-storey Overseer Outpost on the far side of the plaza. I know from experience that the building is packed with zealots whose religious commandments don't extend to not killing me. Alas, it's also a deliciously tempting treasure trove of Runes, which can be used to upgrade my abilities.

Before you know it, I'm knee deep in Overseers. The battle empties my ammo reserves and nearly costs me my life, but I'm the last man standing—mostly because the rest all end up with their legs chopped off.

I pour my ill-gotten Runes into upgrading Blink and acquiring a double jump. These prove incredibly useful in the next level, as I climb to the roof of the Addermire Institute and descend on the unsuspecting guards below. A few near-misses—including almost running into a Wall of Light, which would have vaporized me—and some creative violence (my favorite involving a stun mine attached to a bottle of pear soda) later, I'm back aboard the ship on my way to Aventa.

This success leaves me feeling—fairly literally—on top of the world. Which is naturally where it all goes wrong. Remembering another handy shortcut, I scurry up a telegraph pole, jump, and aim Blink at the roof of Aventa station. Apparently, my aim was off. I materialize in the air short of my target and, something about pride and falls going through my head, drop to the streets below.

So, another adventure comes to a rather anticlimactic end. Oh well, back to the start again, and back to Emily. Surely she won't let me down... ■

WHAT IS IT?
An immersive sim in a beautifully designed steampunk world, where you can sneak, stab, or shoot your way to victory.



"I'm the last man standing—mostly because the rest all end up with their legs chopped off"





NOW PLAYING





Returning to the forgotten gem that is **Murdered: Soul Suspect** reminds us of the good old days **ADAM BRYANT**

PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX / **DEVELOPER** AIRTIGHT GAMES / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** JUNE 2014

They just don't make them like they used to. That's the old adage that older generations cry when things change and they want to reminisce on the halcyon days. However, in the case of *Murdered: Soul Suspect*, I feel this is true, or maybe I'm just getting old.

Now, I'm not saying that *Murdered* is a spectacular game. It's not. It's fairly short, the combat is less than inspiring, and it has little to no replay value. That said, it permeates a certain quality and charm that against all my better judgement has me wanting to return to it every so often, and is the reason I'm coming back to it now. It's a game that doesn't fit into any particular genre, and these niche, hard-to-define games are becoming few and far between, especially for big studios.

One of the reasons I enjoy it so much is that it managed to hook me in right from the start. The opening sequence that introduces you to the main character is possibly one of the most effectively succinct introductions I've ever witnessed in a game. In the space of a few minutes I'm already invested in the story, and know everything I need to know about the protagonist without feeling like I've just been force-fed exposition.

A dying breed

The other reason is that the whole premise of the game is unique and intriguing. You play heavy smoker and police detective with a troubled past Ronan O'Connor, who's managed to track down a serial killer, known as The Bell Killer, that's been terrorizing the town of Salem, Massachusetts, to an apartment building. A short while later The Bell Killer throws you from the top floor of said building and pumps seven hot lead bullets into your chest, ending your life, as well as your investigation, or so it seems. You return as a ghost (as do your cigarettes) and, with the help of a young medium called Joy, set out to investigate your own murder so that you can pass on to the afterlife and reunite with your long-deceased wife, Julia. That's right, you get to investigate your own murder! How cool is that? It even integrates the history of the Salem witch trials in an interesting way.

Unfortunately not many people seemed to think so, as the game received mixed reviews and suffered from poor sales, which sadly resulted in the closure of Airtight Games just a month after the game's release. Interestingly, it looked like the studio was aware of its fate well before it happened. Early on in the game, you have to visit a police station in order to release one of your leads who's being held in custody. As you wander around the station there's a few Easter eggs you can find, including the computer desktop screensaver showing the *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* menu screen. But one comes in the form of a series of Post-it notes found on a bulletin board. It's hard to see, but you can just make out that one of them reads "85 on Metacritic, or we're screwed". It must have been difficult knowing that you're given the ultimatum of having to get a high aggregate score in order to continue making games.

It would be great to see more of these niche games from large studios in the future, but the likelihood is that we won't, and that's quite sad. There's something quite special about this game, so if you haven't already done so give it a shot. Maybe you'll be pleasantly surprised. ■



"You can just make out a Post-it note on a bulletin board that reads '85 on Metacritic, or we're screwed'"

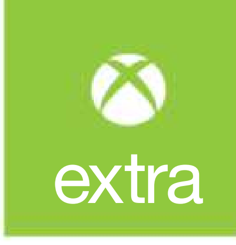
WHAT IS IT?

A supernatural murder detective story that has you solving your own murder to stop a serial killer.



RETROSPECTIVE
BIOSHOCK



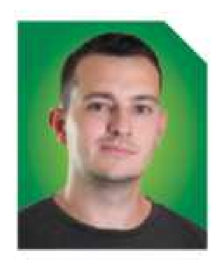




With its art deco architecture and individualist ideology, BioShock's undersea city still enraptures today

ALEX SPENCER

PUBLISHER 2K GAMES / **DEVELOPER** IRRATIONAL GAMES / **FORMAT** XBOX 360, XBOX ONE





More than a decade on from Irrational's first trip beneath the waves, the city of Rapture is still one of gaming's most unique and memorable settings. An undersea city built by people who really, really didn't want to pay their taxes, overlooked by huge statues of its founder, and decked out in art deco style, it remains a remarkable place to visit.

Not that you get much chance for undisturbed sightseeing. Because you're sharing the space with Rapture's monstrous residents—and they're not happy about it. Enter the Splicers, citizens who manipulated their own genetics so much it deformed their bodies and drove them mad. Now they scurry through the ruins of the city, still wearing the tattered remnants of the clothes they wore back in the glory days of Rapture, and sometimes even grotesque masks from the New Year's masquerade ball, the night it all went wrong.

And they aren't even the scariest ones. That title has to go to the hulking diving suit-clad beasts known as Big Daddies. They're indisputably the most iconic characters in *BioShock*—so much so it's a Big Daddy who appears on the front of the box, and the sequel promotes them to a starring role—and they can do serious damage if you rub them up the wrong way.

This combination of population and decoration makes Rapture one of the most distinctive places you'll ever visit on your Xbox. It's all introduced gradually by *BioShock*'s classic opening sequence. After a private flight crashes into the sea, you find yourself among the burning wreckage looking up at an isolated lighthouse in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. You step through its ornate golden door, a crackly record of 1940s jazz playing, and are greeted by a huge statue of Rapture's founder, Andrew Ryan.

From there, it's down twenty thousand leagues under the sea, as a bathysphere tour gives you a taste of everything *BioShock* has to offer, condensed into a couple of minutes. Ryan's charismatic but troubling sloganeering. Beautiful vintage posters. A whale swimming between the towers of undersea skyscrapers, their neon lights blinking through the murk. Your first distant glimpse of a Big Daddy, and an up-close view of a murderous Splicer. Even an early hint at the game's eventual plot twist, with the first deployment of a phrase that would prove to be very important indeed: "Would you kindly".

Sea change

The promise of *BioShock*, all laid out in this sequence, is almost as ambitious and unlikely as the construction of a city at the bottom of the ocean.

A story-driven first-person shooter, in a unique setting, with a political critique at the center? In 2007, that was practically unprecedented.

But *BioShock* existed in a clear lineage, one that stretched back more than a decade—to 1994's *System Shock*, and the 'immersive sim' genre it helped birth. These games established interlocking simulated systems for the player to interact with however they chose, often discovering emergent possibilities that the designer may never have intended.

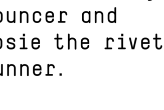
Developer Irrational had been responsible for *System Shock*'s sequel, and this game was often described as its spiritual successor—hence the 'Shock' in the title. *BioShock*'s success helped lay the foundations for a second wave of immersive sim games, headed up by *Dishonored* and the revival of the *Deus Ex* series.

The most obvious inheritance from *BioShock*'s immersive sim lineage comes in the form of Plasmids, superhuman abilities that let you customize your playstyle. These

RAP-TURE MUSIC

The game features 30 licensed song from 1940s and 1950s artists like Bing Crosby, Billie Holiday and Noel Coward.





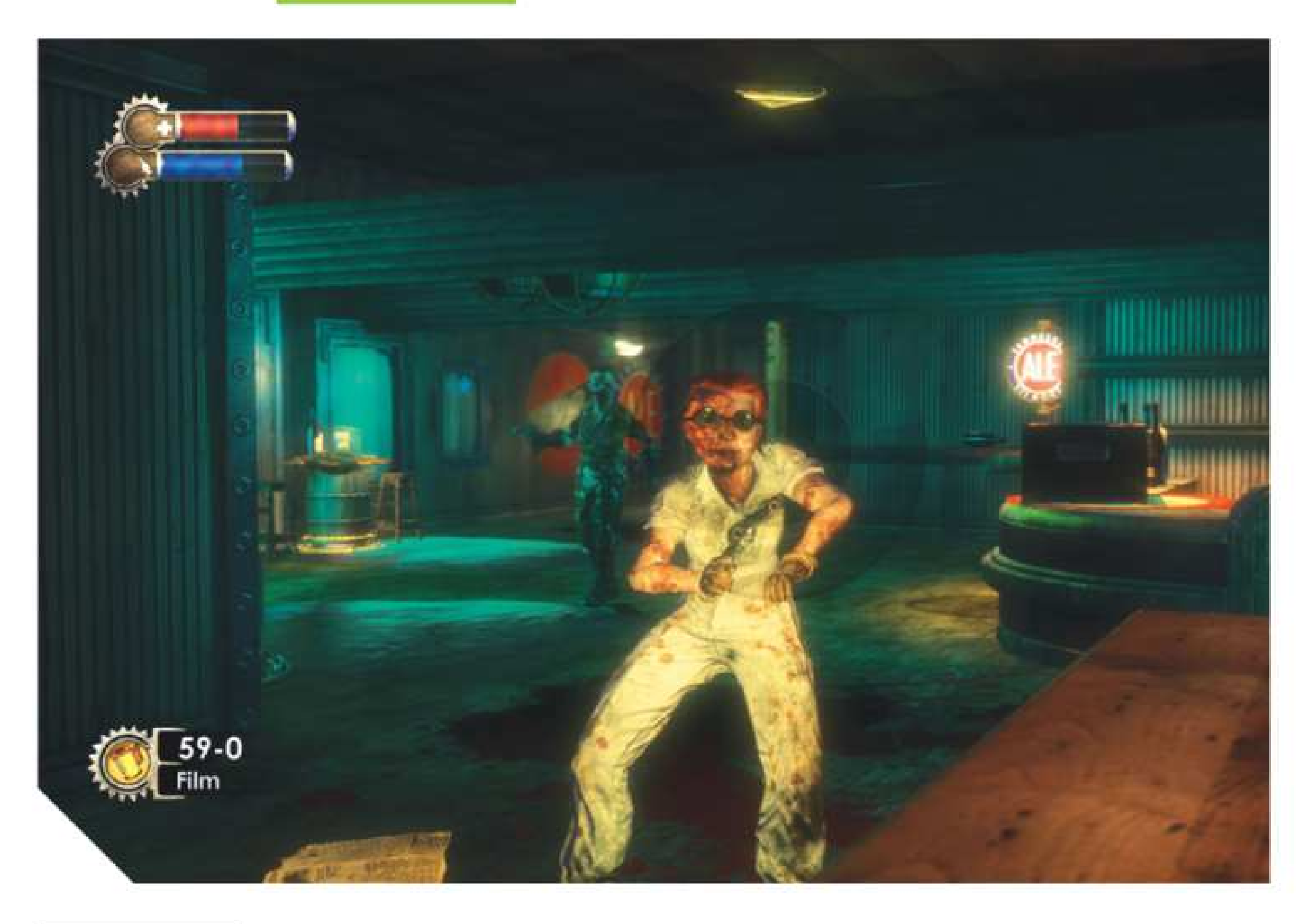
ABOVE There are two types of Big Daddy: The drill-wielding Bouncer and Rosie the rivet gunner.

vary from fireballs to tornado traps, perhaps most importantly, powers that have the effect of turning your enemies against one another.

The shooting itself isn't particularly satisfying—*BioShock* isn't a game for connoisseurs of 'gun feel', or headshot fiends—but these abilities offer options in combat far beyond the usual shotgun-or-pistol choices. Throw an Electro Bolt at a puddle to fry any Splicers standing in the water. Use Telekinesis to pick up a grenade and fling it back the way it came. Hack one of Rapture's flying sentry bots to turn its turret to your side, or use the Security Bullseye Plasmid to send it after a specific foe.

There is a fairly major flaw in the design of *BioShock*'s combat, however—the existence of Vita-Chambers. These are booths scattered around Rapture which resurrect you after dying. They're an attempt to justify respawning within the game's fiction, and eventually turn out to be a vital plot point, but they sap the tension of fights.

Dying normally just means popping up a room or two back, with nothing lost. Your progress is maintained—any enemies you've shot stay dead—and this means any encounter can be brute forced through sheer persistence and repetition. It's especially damaging to the Big Daddy battles, which should be climactic moments. The lumbering beasts soak up bullets, so rather than experiment with different methods, the best approach is to fight until you die, over and over, respawning and



ABOVE You've eventually given a camera that lets you snap enemies to learn their weaknesses.

slowly chipping away at its enormous reserve of health. It's a disappointing waste of one of gaming's all-time great enemies.

Shocking behavior

Ultimately, the shooting is probably the least interesting thing about the game *BioShock*. What really pulls you through Rapture's levels is its story. Not just in the sense of plot-advancing cutscenes—though these do deliver some great moments—but the story that's sprinkled throughout.

Something else that *BioShock* inherited from the *System Shock* games was a focus on environmental storytelling—where details of the game world deliver parts of a narrative that you have to piece together yourself. Bodies placed in a way that suggest how they might have gotten there. Posters that fill out your sense of what this city was like before society collapsed. Graffiti… oh so much graffiti.

The game's structure leads you to a string of hubs, each using environmental clues to convey the history of the space and the personality of the person who serves, essentially, as its end-of-level boss. It's not always subtle—we are, after all, talking about messages scrawled in blood—but it delivers some of the game's absolute highpoints.

Like, for example, Fort Frolic. Headed up by Sander Cohen, a psychopathic artist whose preferred medium is human corpses, the area is filled with eerie examples of Cohen's work—bodies posed and sealed in plaster to create human statues. Generally considered the game's best level, Fort Frolic was designed by Jordan Thomas, who would go on to lead the development of *BioShock 2*.

Supporting this visual storytelling are the audio logs: Diaries of Rapture's residents tucked away in corners of the world. They're definitely a contrivance—why is everyone speaking their thoughts out loud and recording them?—but they're also a great way of squeezing in a little more story, and rewarding exploration.

"It's undeniably cathartic to unload a shotgun into monsters spouting rhetoric like 'altruism is the root of all wickedness'"

BEYOND THE SEA

One of the effects of *BioShock* was that it made immersive sims a mainstream proposition. Here are three of the best games it inspired.



CASE OF THE EX
DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION
Don't like *BioShock*'s combat? As part of its philosophy, *Deus Ex* lets you skip fights altogether.



BUILDING A DUNWALL
DISHONORED
Dunwall, *Dishonored*'s eldritch steampunk version of Victorian London, is the rare game setting that can rival Rapture.



SPACED OUT
PREY
Arkane's reboot perfected the 'left hand powers/right hand gun' formula, letting you transform into a coffee mug.

The environment and audio logs are sometimes used to tell self-contained stories, and sometimes to tie into the larger plot. You'll find your first clue to the game's big twist hidden in an audio diary. It's a twist that works because you've been slowly steeped in it over hours, through every storytelling method *BioShock* has at its disposal. I won't spoil it here—and frankly, the impact of the reveal is hard to convey without experiencing it first-hand—but it makes you question everything you've played up to that point, in a way that had rarely been seen in a game at the time, especially in a mainstream shooter.

Rand-y sailors

The other story which spans the length of *BioShock* is the question of how Rapture came to be, what it was like to live there, and what happened when it all came crashing down on New Year's 1959. And this is where the game's political message seeps in like water between the cracks in Rapture's ceilings—and occasionally comes crashing in with all the blunt force of the ocean.

BioShock was conceived as a critique of Objectivism, an ideology developed by Russian-American writer Ayn Rand, most famously in her 1957 novel *Atlas Shrugged*. Objectivism, among other things, states that humans have no duty to one another, and that everyone should be free to pursue their own self-interest, without governmental intervention.



TOP There are still tattered remnants of the decorations from Rapture's final party strewn throughout the city.

ABOVE *BioShock*'s moral choices don't really work. Kill a little girl, or don't—it's not the most nuanced decision.

These are the philosophical foundations on which Rapture was built. Andrew Ryan—a near anagram of Ayn Rand—practically shouts chunks of Objectivist ideology at you throughout the game, while Splicers bemoan 'the parasite' or scream "I'm your better!" as they sprint towards you. It's about as subtle as a Fox News segment.

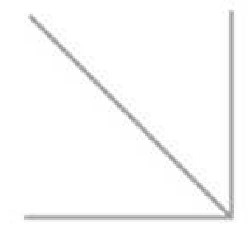
BioShock's point is that Objectivism doesn't work—after all, Rapture is not exactly in rude health when you arrive—but it's questionable how much deeper the critique goes than that. Nevertheless, at the time, it was thrilling to be playing a big-budget game that was so overtly political. And today, it's undeniably cathartic to unload a shotgun into monsters spouting rhetoric like "altruism is the root of all wickedness".

But even if you'd prefer to just shut off that bit of your brain as you play, there's plenty to enjoy in Rapture. The gorgeous commercials that show when you buy a new Plasmid, animated in a vintage style reminiscent of *Fallout*'s Vault Boy. Creepy vignettes, like the Splicer casting an enormous silhouette onto the wall as she cries over a pram—a pram which, you eventually discover, contains only a loaded revolver. Moments of majesty, as you turn a corner and are suddenly reminded that this art deco city exists at the bottom of the sea, and horror, as the lights unexpectedly go out and you hear unhinged cackling from somewhere behind you.

The game still looks pretty great, especially if you pick up the recent remastered version, and while the cracks in its design have only become more visible with age—the combat lacks finesse, and some of the environmental storytelling that felt so pioneering at the time now looks a little clumsy—few games since have offered such a brilliantly distinctive atmosphere. Rapture isn't somewhere you'd want to live, but it's a wonderful place to revisit. ■



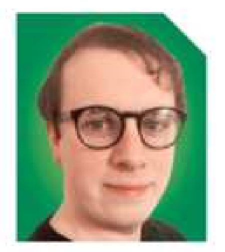
WHY I LOVE... THE LEGO GAMES



Bricky versions of beloved franchises might be a hard sell, but there's nothing quite like the LEGO games **ALEX NELSON**

PUBLISHER VARIOUS / **DEVELOPER** VARIOUS / **FORMAT** XBOX 360, XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** VARIOUS

BELOW Seeing how LEGO games imitate the original artwork is all part of the fun.



However you chose to categorize the mainline LEGO games (there are a number of contentious criteria to consider), there have been a relatively large number of entries in a short space of time.

Over 20 of the blocky action-adventure games have graced Xbox consoles in the 13 years since *LEGO Star Wars*' 2005 release, each giving a marginal update on a tried-and-tested formula. But though they rarely bring anything new to the table between each release, they are still a reliable source of fun, met with praise for each new instalment. But why?

The answer is simple: If it ain't broke, don't fix it. When *LEGO Star Wars* was first announced, few could have expected it would be the first game in a long-line of tie-ins that would still be seeing new releases over a decade later. A new *Star Wars* game? Yes please! One in which everything's made out of LEGO? Err, well... But it proved a surprise success—a plastic rendition of George Lucas' sprawling space opera was something gamers never knew they needed—and even managed to make *Episode I*'s trade embargoes fun.

The premise is simple: You guide a cast of Minifigures through levels based on key moments from pop culture staples, be that iconic movie moments, comic book crusades, or completely original scenarios involving your favorite characters.

Bashing the LEGO-made assets within a scene rewards you with a satisfying shower of separated blocks and shiny studs—which work as in-game currency—and certain objects will break down into constituent parts, which you can then rebuild in a whirlwind of plastic into something new, often key to making it to a level's next section. There are puzzles too, which usually require the player to make use of the two onscreen characters' combined abilities—perfect for drop-in, drop-out co-op. Split-screen, cooperative multiplayer is something which all the LEGO games come with as standard, and in an age where that is dying a slow death, they present us with repeated reminders of its necessity. Working together with a friend to go on a stud-strewn rampage is an absolute blast, with stretches of LEGO-smashing chaos only punctured by considered moments to contemplate a puzzle's solution.



"LEGO Star Wars: The Force Awakens is one of the best Star Wars games you could ever play"

WHAT IS IT?

LEGO's long-running series of games deliver mindless fun, ridiculously charming humor, and some of the best movie tie-in games you'll ever play on Xbox

Piece by piece

It's all delivered with such charm too. For an idea, imagine *Pirates Of The Caribbean*'s Saturday matinee stylings as told with the British humor of a Cheshire production studio, or if Leslie Nielsen's spoof-humor popped up in the grizzled fantasy realms of *Lord Of The Rings*.

Earlier iterations delivered their stories through nothing more than slapstick pratfalls and barely decipherable grunts; that allowed for all manner of sight gags and humorous references, but a decent grasp of the original material was a help. More recent games have audio and dialogue ripped right from the big-screen adventure they are portraying, which really gives them that 'game-of-the-movie' feel while retaining all the silliness you'd expect.



ABOVE The LEGO games are suitable for all the family, making them super accessible.

BELOW Your characters' special abilities come in handy when you meet obstacles.



You will quickly find yourself wanting to see what quirky detail the animators have managed to get into even the most obscure characters' idle animations. The moment I unlocked a LEGO Dory, and it slowly dawned on me that the stars of other Pixar franchises were to be present in the recent *LEGO The Incredibles*, a huge, beaming grin ripped across my face.

There is often talk of the lack of proper videogame adaptations of big-screen favorites, usually citing the fact that historically they've always been 'a bit crap' as the reason for their absence. But the LEGO games have been bucking that trend of mediocrity with every new release. It's hard to say which of the games is the best. 2013's *LEGO Marvel Superheroes* introduced fully open-world sections between its levels, so it stands out as a highlight, while *LEGO Star Wars: The Force Awakens* is genuinely one of the best *Star Wars* games you could ever play.

Whatever the next game is after *LEGO DC Super-Villains*, you can be sure it will be worth your time, and they are the kind of games that give hope to even the most leftfield of tie-ins. The recent reveal of Gears Pop! had me scratching my head, but then I remembered my love of the LEGO games. It is surprising that more publishers have not tried their hand at crafting a similarly unlikely mash-up. But then, maybe the LEGO games simply cannot be beaten. ■

→ WHAT GAMES DO YOU LOVE? SEND YOUR LUSTY THOUGHTS TO OXM@FUTURENET.COM



10 BEST DANCE MOVES IN XBOX HISTORY

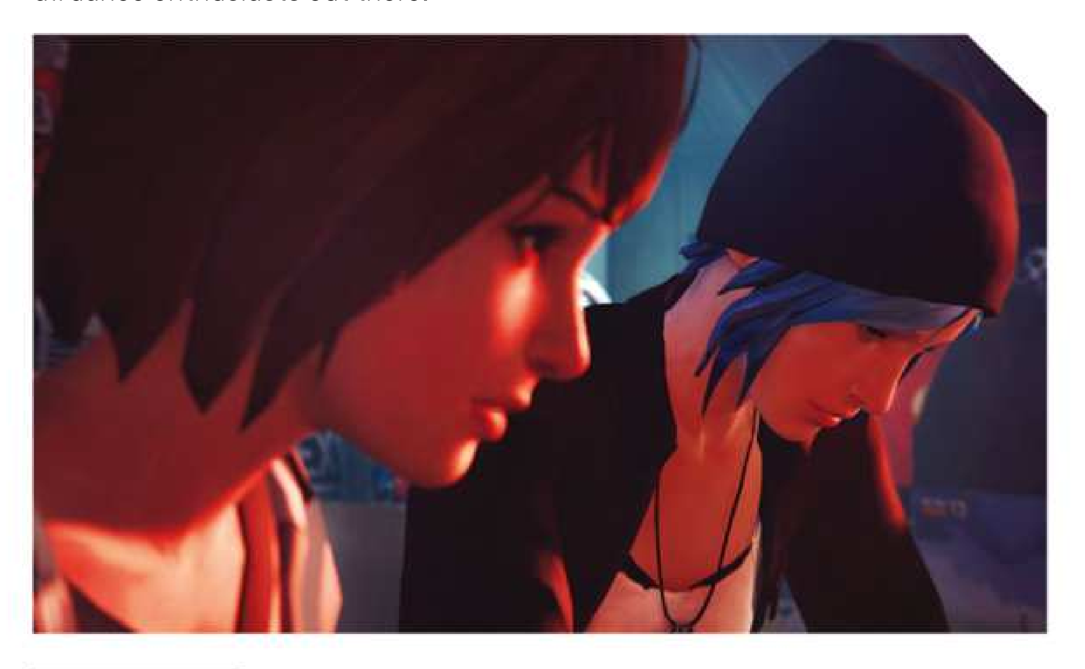
It's time to loosen those limbs and show us what you've got as we break down some of the best boogie-ing, jigs, and prancing that Xbox has to offer **DANIELLA LUCAS**

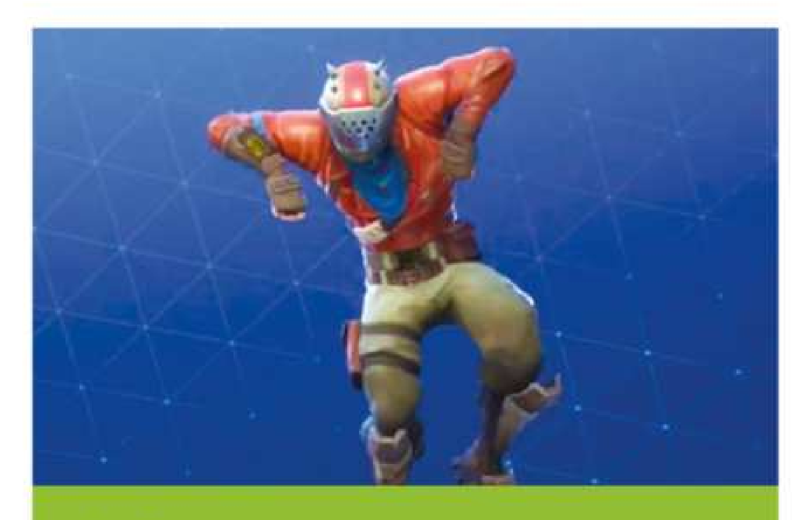


10

BED-JUMPING—LIFE IS STRANGE

We're starting off with a nice little warm-up that you can practise in the safety of your own room away from leering eyes, just like Max and Chloe from this excellent story-based game. Turn up that stereo, get up on top of your bed and jump away, adding a nice little slow arm-wave as you do, for maximum effect. Bonus points if you're making a fool of yourself to help cheer up a friend in the process while showing off how carefree and unpredictable you are. It's a really simple, sweet dance, but one that shows just how strong Chloe's character is as she ropes the more reserved Max into joining her. A great start for all dance enthusiasts out there.





09

HOTTENANNY—FORTNITE

This is a classical silly jig that's absolutely perfect for when you want to rub in a victory by making your opponent feel as stupid as possible for their failings. It might not be the greatest or most popular of *Fortnite*'s multiple dance routines, but it's just so versatile and pleasing to execute. The secret is in keeping your arms perfectly level every time you raise them while your legs move wildly underneath you. It's just the right amount of joyful flailing to be incredibly irritating to those around you. It's like it's been purposefully designed to help you troll others. Though it's obviously terrible and totally inappropriate if someone ever uses it against us. Completely different circumstances, honest!

08

FLOWER DANCE—STARDEW VALLEY

Sometimes old traditions can make for some truly meaningful moments, like in this Spring festival for instance. Taking place every year on the 24th of Spring, the Flower Dance lets you experience the character-building truths of rejection, as no one wants to dance with the strange new farmer. You can watch awkwardly from the sidelines and worry about whether it's because you smell like manure, or if it's the sweat dripping from your brow after hoeing all of that earth. Don't worry though, if you make friends with some villagers by the time year two rolls around, you'll finally be able to talk someone into saying yes to your proposition. Persistence pays off.





07

ARM WAVE RAVE—DARK SOULS

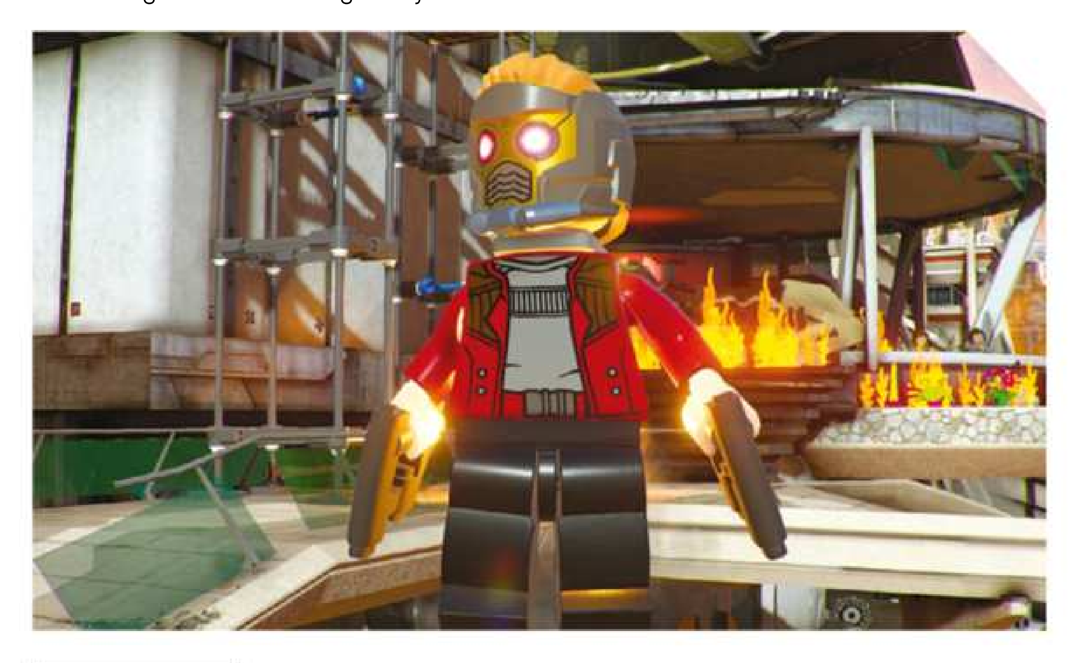
Okay, so technically this one isn't a real dance, but sometimes you need to work with the limited moveset you've got when you need to express yourself. Sometimes a simple repeated gesture can become a performance worthy of *Swan Lake* thanks to the power of interpretive dance. Used mostly in multiplayer to convey joy, thanks, or even for mocking others, you grab your weapon in both hands, and then use parry repeatedly so that your blade wiggles back and forth in a mesmerizing wave maneuver. Sometimes the best dances may be simplistic in scope, but carry plenty of weight thanks to their inventiveness. Even praising the sun can't beat a good wiggle-off.



06

AWESOME MIX—LEGO MARVEL SUPERHEROES 2

The '80s were an amazing time for music, so it's no wonder Star-Lord from the Guardians of the Galaxy knows how to bust a groove with his trusty cassette player, even if he has been shrunk down to LEGO piece size. It turns out you can still get jiggy with it even if you don't have movable elbows, and are stuck with yellow clasps for hands. Quill's moves and music are so mesmerizing that even those around him can't help but become incapacitated through dancing, making them easy targets to pick off with much less friendly attacks. It's time to move your hips and perfect your step and slide to charm your enemies into doing the same alongside you.





05

THE CARLTON—DESTINY

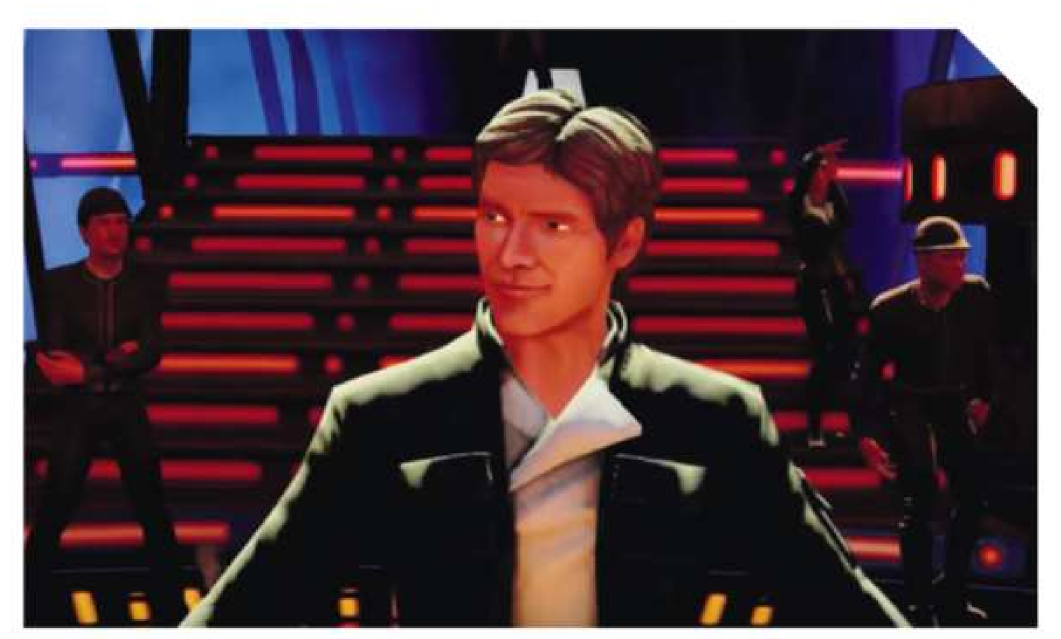
A true classic of the dance world perfectly digitalized for all gamers to enjoy when out hunting for engrams, or just hanging out at *Destiny*'s original Tower. Sometimes the real world has perfected something so well that it doesn't need to be changed, but *Destiny* did the best job of recreating this iconic carefree swing from the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air's dorky cousin. Get your smug grin on and swing those arms nice and wide, side to side, while clicking your fingers. Truly this is the happiest of dances, suitable for any occasion. Even when humanity is on the brink of extinction thanks to alien warfare, there's still time to show the world just how flexible your hips are.



04

RIDIN' SOLO—KINECT STAR WARS

How anyone who's involved in the *Star Wars* franchise allowed this monstrosity to happen is beyond us, but it's glorious in its extreme awkwardness. You might have to watch it between your fingers while cringing, but there's nothing quite like seeing the suave Han Solo dance away to an edited version of Jason Derulo's 'Ridin' Solo' with custom lyrics just for him. He's also got his own themed moves such as a dab-like 'trash compactor' that's meant to imitate you pushing back the edges like in the iconic scene, and 'double blaster' finger guns. We're not sure those moves would impress anyone in the Cantina, but the absurdity of this makes them a classic to us.





03

ROMANTIC WALTZ—DRAGON AGE INQUISITION

With a lot at stake, the last place you'd expect to see so much backstabbing and drama is at an official ball held at the Winter Palace. But in order to help sort through a vicious plot you'll have to show all of your best moves while being as graceful as possible in front of the duchess. While you show some refined, stately maneuvers early on, it's the second, secret waltzing opportunity that shines more thanks to its intimacy. Balls are also a perfect time for romance, so after everything has been sorted there's a chance to pull in your beau of choice tightly and sway with them under the moonlight on a private balcony. Cullen's shyness is particularly adorable here. Swoon.

02

AWKWARD SHUFFLE—MASS EFFECT

We've all been there. It's 2am in the club, and you're feeling a little tipsy. You've steered clear of the dancefloor all night, but it's started to call to you. Against your better judgment you make a few tentative steps towards the center of the room... and then it happens. Your head starts to bop oddly, your arms are set to a rhythm out of synch with the rest of your body, and all your feet can do is vaguely shuffle. Then your space friends notice the trouble you seem to have over controlling your own movements, and then the laughing starts. Oh dear. Commander Shepard knows this experience all too well, and never quite manages to fix it even after three games' worth of practice. Ignore the haters Shepard, dance on!



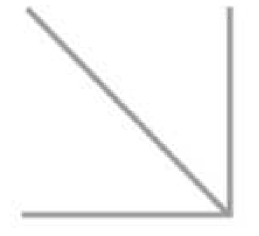
01 FLOSSING—FORTNITE

Another entry for the world's biggest online shooter, but can you blame us when it's responsible for spreading 2018's most iconic dance move? Flossing has gotten so big it's been used to celebrate goals during the recent World Cup and several other sporting events. Sure, it existed before *Fortnite*, but without the Battle Royale game it wouldn't be nearly as popular as it is today.

It might look like simple arm-swinging at first, but it's all in the timing when switching sides and remembering which arm to swing behind you. We dare you to try it like all of the cool kids if you think it looks too 'easy'—you can't scoff at its popularity until you try it. Don't worry if you can't master it though, at least you'll be able to do it at the press of a button when celebrating your next victory royale in the game.

the disc slot

They make the games we love, but what do they play for fun? We ask developers to pick their faves from Xbox history. This month: **Martin Wahlund**

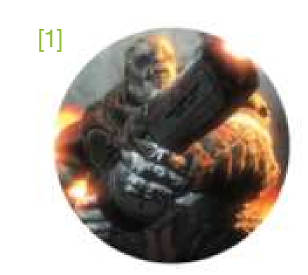


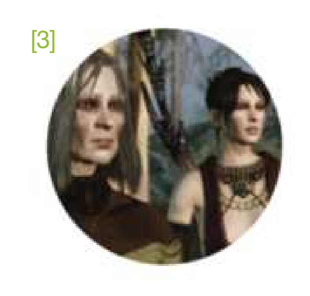




Martin Wahlund
Co-founder, Fatshark
Co-founder of Fatshark and Bitsquid who has a huge passion for soccer. He's the main man behind *Warhammer—Vermintide 1 & 2*, and chairman of the board for the Swedish game industry.

I have spent a lot of time with the original Gears Of War [1]. I obviously enjoyed playing co-op with a friend. The over-the-top characters, and naturally the chainsaw, are great aspects of the game. I am now excited about the fifth game that was announced at the most recent E3, and for where the journey leads. Bionic Commando Rearmed [2] is another game that I enjoyed a lot. Visually it looked great, it was fast, and the gameplay was pretty hectic for a platformer. We worked closely with the team that created it at Grin. The Challenge Rooms should be called the Impossible Rooms! I have also played a lot of the Dragon Age [3] games and enjoy them a lot. Of all of them I probably enjoyed the first one the most. Also, who doesn't love a great RPG and the evolution of relationships between your party members? Vin Diesel's Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay [4] is a game I was really impressed by. As a Swede, I was proud that it was developed in Sweden, for starters. It's one of many games that I had a hard time stopping playing, as I just wanted to play a bit more, and then a bit more still. I liked the combination of stealth and FPS action. I love soccer, and I played in a minor league until recently. FIFA [5] is a perfect game to bring out when friends come over, or to play with your kids. My six-year-old son asked if the World Cup games we watch on television are real soccer or *FIFA*. That is how far the series has come.

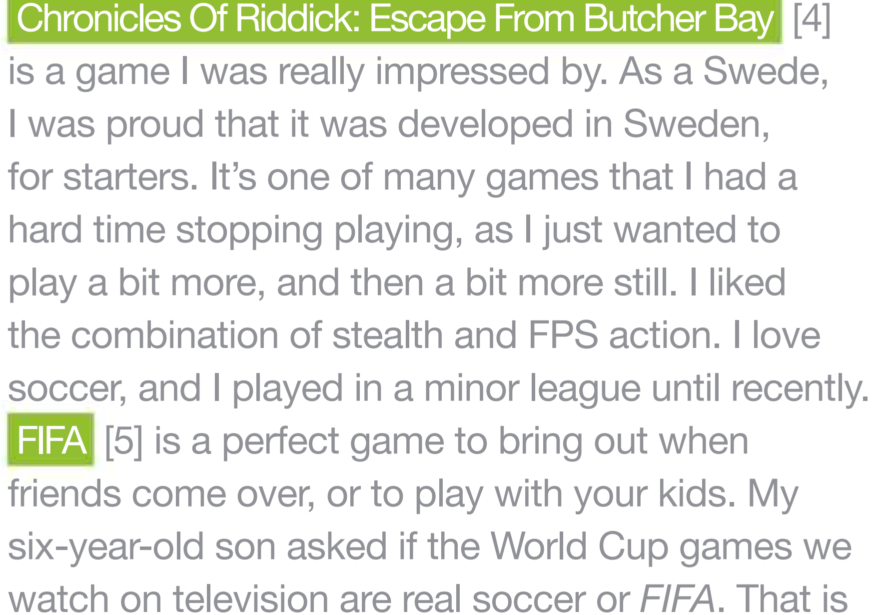
[1]


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LOVE THIS ISSUE? THE NEXT ONE WILL BE READY FOR YOU ON OCTOBER 16